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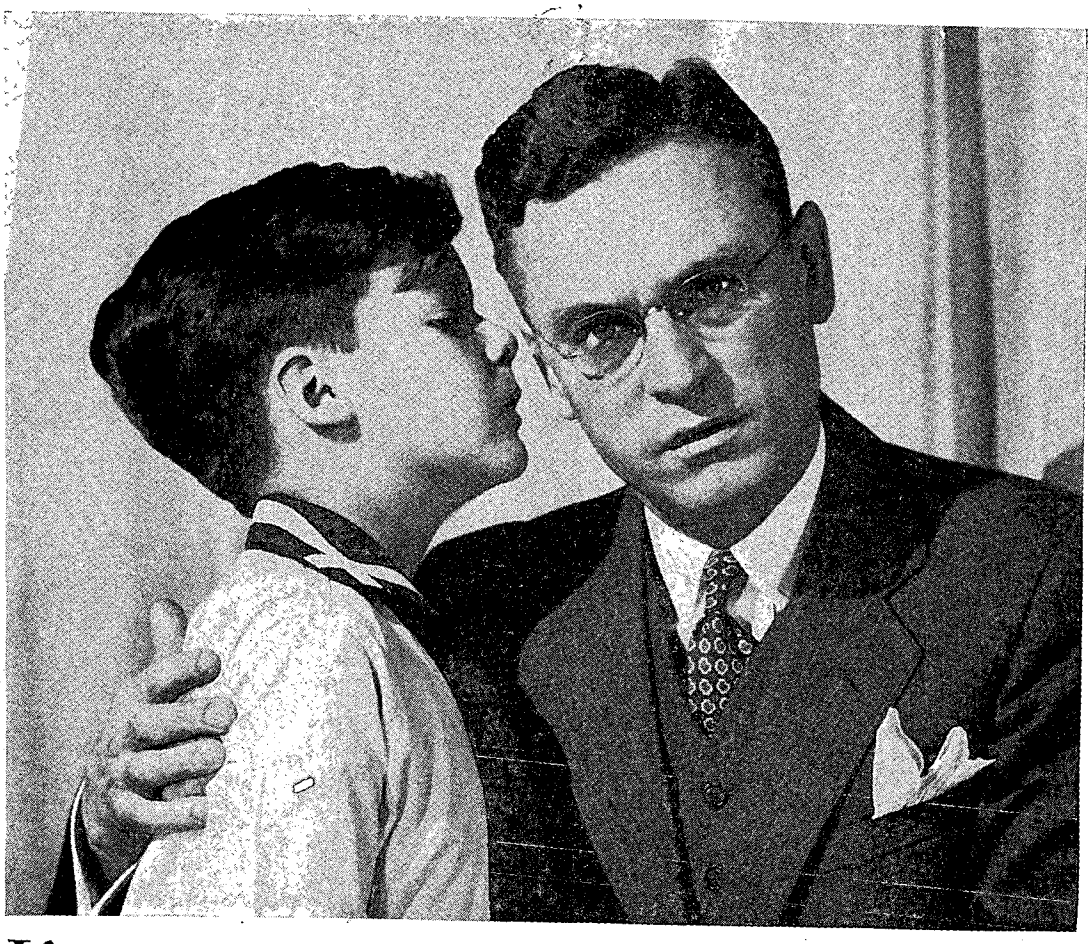

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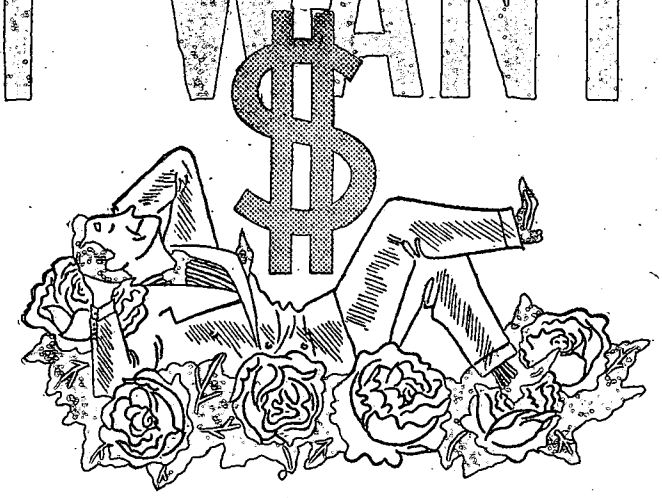

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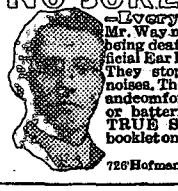

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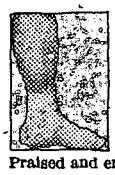

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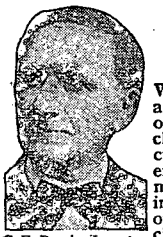

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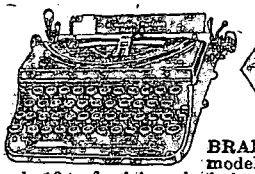

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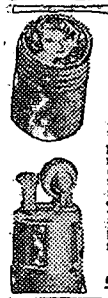

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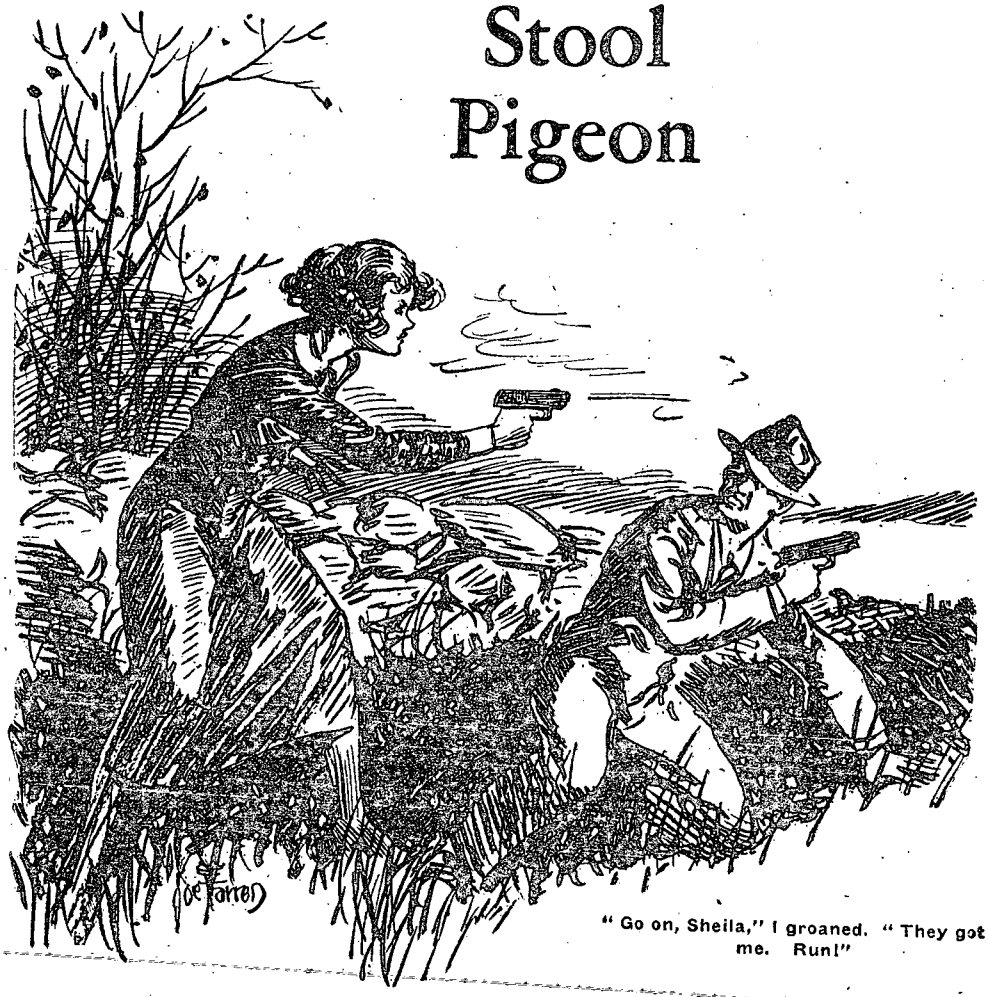

"Go on, Sheila," I groaned. "They got me. Run!"

Foreword

THE name Painton has tacked onto me in this yarn isn't mine. I want to keep on breathing and lots of guys hold grudges. Some of the facts in this story are true—the big ones, I mean—but the rest have been changed around so that there'll be no pencil pointing to me. The facts did not happen in the order Painton has them, and I was against telling it this way; but he said it had to be told like a story to be interesting, and as long as I get my split I said okay. There are tricks to every racket and this one is his.

I am letting him tell some of the things that happened to me because people got the idea that stool pigeons are all-time, all-American heels. Well, some of them are yellow snitches that would sell their own grandmother for a drink of smoke. But there are others who are guys like me trying to get a new stake and go straight, and they're good guys. They hold their lives in their two hands and a lot of them get bumped and nobody ever knows how or why except the detective they were stooling for—and he don't talk. A lot of stoolies do real undercover dickwork and do it good. And let me tell you that if it wasn't for stoolies ninety per cent of the crimes in America would go unsolved. If you don't believe me ask any detective in any city of good size. So let Painton go ahead and do his stuff. You'll find out what we are up against in this business.

—CHICK DUDE MANEY.

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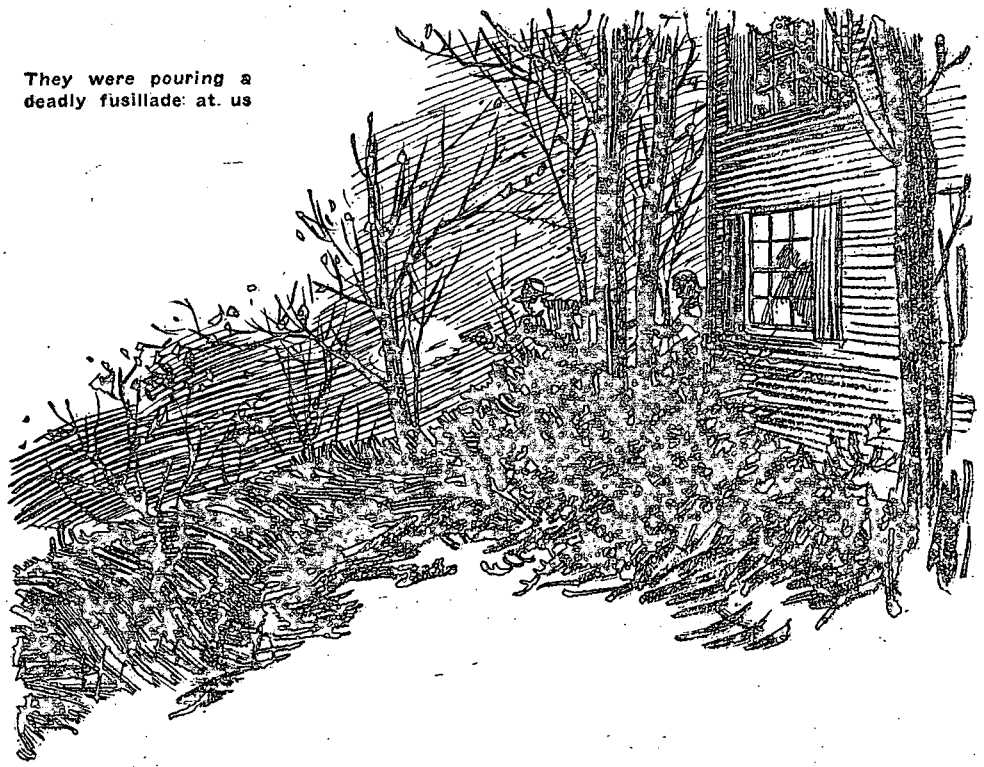

They were pouring a deadly fusillade at us

By Frederick C. Painton

CHAPTER I

Lady Afraid

IT'S my business to know everybody on Broadway by sight because nowadays the crooks gather there like the brokers go to their Stock Exchange. It's my business to remember who meets who at what bar because later, when something breaks, two guys or a doll meeting may give me the hunch where to look for information when Detective Pete Laird comes around asking for it. Pete is the dick I work for, and nobody but he and I know this, so we meet in out-of-the-way places, he with a pocketful of sawbucks and me, usually, with dope that helps him break a case. He's a good guy and we're friends. It is also my business to have a quick scram-chute in case I get tagged as a stoolie and somebody comes gunning for me. So I live on the East Side on the third floor of a walk-up that has a fire escape that passes within two feet of my window. This back-yard ladder lets me come and go without the landlady asking questions. She thinks I'm a steelworker. Well, I was once.

Hated and Feared by Both Sides of the Law, the Stool Pigeon Writes His Own Story — a Dramatic Account Which Is More Truth Than Fiction

Anyway, this night I was in the hay early because I'd picked a long shot at

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Narragansett and got eighty bucks for four and I'd celebrated early and hard at Johnny's bar. But I sleep light, so I heard the sound in the darkness and woke up silently and soberly. I reached for my gun which is not under any pillow but holstered under my pajamas. I breathed long and steady, then grunted, made mushy sounds with my mouth and rolled over.

A body was silhouetted between me and the lighter darkness of the window. If I could have seen that same lighter darkness between the silhouette's legs I'd have shot instantly. But I didn't. I jerked the bedlight, leveled the gun and said, "Okay, sweetheart, keep your hands—for cat's sake, Helen, what are you doing here?"

She came closer.

"Don't point that thing at me, Chick," she whispered nervously, "and turn off the light—quick!"

I gave her a long gander. Helen Dunn never hurt anybody's eyes. There was a time when Flo Ziegfeld was alive when she took big and little casino for beauty. And she was a honey now. Her straw-colored hair was wavy with a girlish blue bow in it; and the front teeth she lost that time when Si Marlin took a swing at her in the Parrot Club had been replaced so you'd hardly know it was a plate. She was slim and she still had that hot personality that made her aces as a hostess in the Parrot Club. Maybe you think I liked her. I did. Once we were more than friends and that makes a big difference.

A lot of people called her names I can't repeat here, and said she was up to her tonsils in the vice racket. The last was a lie. Maybe she took the come-on Charleys but that was her business. I knew she was warm-hearted, honest in her way, and many a girl owed her plenty when the going was tough.

"Turn out the light, Chick," she repeated.

Her slim body was trembling, though it wasn't cold, and her eyes were almost glassy with terror. I turned out the bedlight, and climbed out of the sheets. I said, "Sit down here, kid, and tell me what you're scared of."

She sat down next to me and I swear her teeth sounded like the clicking of a pair of dice. I put my arm around her and she was cold as ice.

"Come on, kid," I said gently. "There isn't anything in the world to be that afraid of."

"Matt Prance has got me fingered," she whispered. "They're going to kill me."

"What for?"

"I spoke out of turn—about Sheila Rourke." Then her tongue began to spill words, and it was a dirty story. Sheila Rourke was a young girl who came off a radio amateur hour to fill a fifteen-minute spot at the Parrot doing grand imitations. I had seen her and I mean she was the real McCoy. She had a bright lovable personality, a real Irish wit that made her quick on the trigger with come-backs, and besides that she was pretty. Only nineteen, and trying to go places with a hot voice.

As Helen spewed words rapidly, I learned that Matt Prance had been giving the girl a play. But she wanted no part of him.

"So day before yesterday," Helen half-sobbed, "he grabbed her. She's gone. I knew he snatched her. I put it to him. He told me to mind my own business. I said if he didn't turn her loose I'd tell everything I knew about him."

Her long cold fingers tightened crushingly on me. "Maybe I was a fool, Chick, but I'm crazy about Sheila. She's decent like I was once, and she's got a

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boy friend she's carrying the torch for. They're going to be married when she goes back to the sticks where he's working now.

"When I told Matt I'd beef he just looked at me and said, 'You'd better do it right now, Helen. You won't get another chance.'

"And I saw his torpedoes hanging around. I went out through the back alley and I've walked miles—miles to get here."

A lot of things clicked in my mind. Last year, my dick was working on the vice racket and a lot of dope pointed at Matt Prance. But we didn't get to the point of a pinch. But I knew we could now. Helen Dunn knew all the answers.

"So you came to me," I said, "for help?"

"Yeah, listen, Chick, I know you're stooling. You get a cop here and get me safe away and what I'll tell them about the vice racket will fill a book."

I got sore. "What makes you think I'm a stoolie?"

"Don't be a zany. When the vice investigation was on last year, you were around with dough, spending it, and two guys, Chapella and Tredway took the collar and went to stir. You fingered them."

She raised her hand. "But I didn't beef, Chick. I liked you. You knew it when we played around together. And I was sick of the racket and was going to pull out. I'd have been long gone but for Sheila. I wanted her to go places."

I took that silently. "You think Sheila's been bumped?"

It gave me a funny feeling.

She shuddered. "No. He's got her in a hideaway—for himself," she swore like a man, and then relapsed into terror. "Can't the cops get her before it's too late?"

I MOVED over in the darkness and began getting dressed. Here was a break I had been waiting for a long time. If I could cut in on the bust-up of the vice racket that paid a sugar of five million a year, they said, to those in it, Pete Laird would see that I got plenty. Maybe enough to take a powder out of New York and start up new in Arizona like I wanted to.

"Is Matt Prance the big shot in the girl—business?" I asked, lacing my slippers.

"He's only one," she said, "there's one higher than him." She gave an exclamation: "If I thought—"

"If you thought what?"

"Nothing. I'm selling this to the cops for a getaway."

I eased by the window and gave the alley a gander. I couldn't see a thing. I couldn't afford to take a chance on the darkness. I locked the window and went to the door.

"Hop into the bed and pretend to be me," I said. "I'll get back as soon as I can. Maybe a half hour." I fished in the darkness and found a flask. "Here's some good Scotch. Blow yourself to a skinful. You'll feel better."

"You're swell, Chick." She took the flask, then my hand and pressed it against her cold cheek. "I'm scared," she went on, "but I'm glad. I wanted to make the break to getaway. And now I have. And if we can pull Sheila off the spot—"

"We will," I said.

I locked the door after me and pocketed the key. It was two o'clock. I didn't see anybody lamping my joint but I took no chances and walked cross-town to Union Square and dived into an all-night drugstore. I had Detective Laird's house number and I hung on while it rang.

He was sleepy enough when he re-

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sponded, but he woke up when I told him it was me.

"Okay, Chick, let's have it."

I told him the lay, and when he got it he was boiling with excitement.

"I've been wanting to hose that Prance for years," he said. "Go right back to your room and stay there. I'll have the blast put out for you in a burglary rap and the prowl cars can pick you both up."

That suited me. The charge against me would be dropped for lack of evidence, and they'd have Helen without me appearing in the case. I went back to the house and cased the front, but the street was quiet. I went up softly and in the dark. I unlocked the door and went in. I could see Helen lying on the bed. Just her silhouette.

"Okay, kid," I said softly, "you're in."

She didn't answer and I wondered if she was asleep. I went to her and shook her. But I didn't call her name again. My hand came away all sticky. Then I noticed the curtains blowing lightly in the draft from the window. I took a gander out of the window before I turned my back to it. But I couldn't see a thing until I closed the window. Then I saw a hole through the glass, and it was frosted all around with cracks. The hole was as big as my head and a guy could just about through and turn the fastener.

"But that wasn't how it was done," I muttered, "somebody made a noise and got her up. They plugged her with a silenced gun."

A gun with a Maxim silencer can only fire one shot, and it has to be good. This one was perfect. Right through the pump. But then they'd come in to frisk her and make sure she was dead. But they were gone now.

I switched on the bedlight and looked at her. Her eyes were open, but the fear was gone. Her face, taut from her life and her years, had softened so that she looked almost girlish. I heard my teeth grinding.

The poor kid! Trying to do a decent thing, and they murdered her for doing it.

Down the street I heard the moan of a police siren. The prowl cars had come. I silently scrammed out of the window. . . .

CHAPTER II

Suspicion

I MET Pete Laird just before daylight on the Forty-second Street crosstown car. You can talk better on a trolley and it's safer than a taxi.

"They got the blast on you for murder, Chick," he told me, "and I'm letting it ride rather than give you away. But we'll have to bear down."

"What did you find on Helen?" I asked.

"A picture of Sheila Rourke with some mugg we haven't identified. And a pearl—a black one."

"A pearl," I repeated. "Hers?"

Laird shook his head. "Search me. It was in her mouth. The medical examiner found it. Under her tongue."

Woman's vanity is funny. At the last minute she probably popped it in there, her best possession, to take it with her wherever she was going. I thought about this and her, and what a good skate she had been.

Then Laird snapped me out of it.

"Matt Prance's guns did it?"

"He had her fingered," I said. "It'll be tough to crack."

"Sure," said Laird, "but we'll crack it. How do you stand with this mob?"

"Jake, as far as I know. I'm supposed to be a burglar, not a girl-punk."

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"Well, stick around them for a while. We'll pinch Prance on another charge and give him a working. If you get a lead on what torpedo blew her off, we can hose it out of him."

It was the usual procedure, and an old one; and it usually worked. But it didn't seem so hot in this case. There was big dough involved with plenty going to mouthpieces and politicians. But it was twenty bucks a day for me while I was prowling around, so I said okay. Tomorrow when the newspapers gave the murder a play the underworld would talk about it as much as Riverside Drive, and drifting around probably I'd hear things.

I left Laird at Fifth Avenue and took an East Side subway downtown. He told me he'd pulled the cops out of my joint, so I could get some clothes. The house was all lit up and I knew the other roomers and the landlady were excited and saying, "I always knew there was something queer about that Chick Maney."

So I cased the alley and went up the fire escape. The window was still open. The body was gone but there was another person in the room.

No light, see, except a tiny torch that was throwing a thin yellow beam under the bed. All I could see was the back of a skirt, two high-heeled slippers and some silk leg. I came into the room noiselessly and stood there for a second.

A woman's voice said, "Damn!" softly.

I waited a bit and then said, "If anybody else comes in here I'm going to charge admission."

She backed her head out from under the bed like a crab. She got to her feet gibbering with terror.

"Well, well," I said, "if it isn't Big Adele Riggs. Now, what would you be doing here?"

You don't know Adele Riggs unless you read crime-vice news, and you wouldn't want to. What it took to be bad and vicious she had in clusters. She was the big mama of the vice ring, and nothing could be lower.

She saw my hand in my pocket, but her nerve came back.

"Honest to Gosh, Chick," she panted, "I was just looking for something. Something that poor Helen might have dropped."

"Poor Helen!" I mimicked. "You hated the ground she walked on. You—" I broke off all in a sweat. I remembered what Laird had said about the pearl. I hunched right then that it hadn't been Helen's. It. . . .

"Were you looking for a black pearl?" I inquired.

She started to tremble again. "I didn't kill her, Chick. Honest to Gosh. I didn't even know you two was sweethearts."

"Then what did you come barging in here for?"

"What right you got to ask?" her voice rose.

I stepped in close to her. "Because Helen Dunn was a swell friend, and a good guy, and whoever murdered her is going to burn—even if it's you. They burn women in this state now."

She reeled a little—she had high blood pressure—and said numbly, "Let me go!"

"Who tipped you that Helen was dead, if you didn't do it?" I asked.

"I ain't saying a word," she cried desperately, "and lay off me less'n you want Matt Prance to take you!"

I SLAPPED her pink, powdered face, and when she bounced back from that one I slapped her again. She began to cry, but silently. She didn't want people to hear. The door

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was police sealed, but people might come if they heard noises.

"I'm going to have Matt kill you, you rat," she whined.

Well, I slapped her again, and I worked over her with threats. But I didn't get to first base. I couldn't threaten her with a pinch. I was supposed to be a crook. So finally, as if I was disgusted, I said, "All right, scram out of here. And tell Matt Prance for me that Helen was my girl, and if you or he put the bump to her I'm coming around to know why."

She grew vicious after she was through the window.

"You don't have to come around, punk, Matt'll come looking for you."

I hastily packed a bag and went out the window after her. She had reached the corner, but there was no taxi around there at that time in the morning so she couldn't duck me. I trailed her crosstown to the east end of Gramercy Park. She climbed a taxi here and I picked another off Third Avenue.

"Tail that Blazer cab, and don't let it get away."

The driver looked at me. "Police?"

"Hell, no. That's my wife, and I'm checking up."

He bore down heavily on the accelerator.

"They beat hell now, don't they?"

I had some time to think then. What if Matt Prance's apes didn't kill Helen, but Big Adele did? If Helen had been sitting into the vice racket farther than I thought, then that would account for Big Adele's hatred. Anyway, it was a thought.

She took me two dollars on the meter to a side street called Furthing Lane under the shadow of Brooklyn bridge. It is a terrible neighborhood. I saw her go into an old brownstone front, and then scrooged down in the seat and had the driver go on by. The number was three forty-seven.

I couldn't do any more there. It was up to Laird to take a lead on that dump. So I drove uptown to the Nautilus Hotel on Forty-third Street and registered in. I called Laird and told him about Big Adele. It had him about as puzzled as it had me.

"I don't see where she fits in, but I'll put a tail on her and watch the Furthing Lane dump. Anything else?"

"No, only it's going to be tough trying to move around with the blast on me."

"You'll have to chance it."

I stayed in all day, snoozing, eating, reading the papers. The P.M. sheets gave the story quite a ride, and it was wonderful to me how so much misinformation got into one place. Helen was my sweetheart, the story said, and she had been two-timing me and I slipped her the works. All terminals and exits from New York were being watched and an arrest was being expected momentarily. It was good for a chuckle and after a thick steak for dinner I ambled out and over toward Broadway. I never really got there. Now, I wasn't anywhere near my regular poolroom, or my favorite bar. But after all I play all Broadway and Matt must have had plenty of guys on the watch-out. Anyway as I stood near the stage exit of the Paramount two guys crowded me, one on either side.

Curly Slade said, "Howsabout coming along nice, Chick?"

They didn't bump me with their rods, but they were plenty close. I figured my chances and grinned.

"One-way ride or do I come back in one piece?"

"Oh, nothing rough. Matt wants to talk to you."

Curly could be lying, or telling the

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truth. I figured my chances again and decided it was no dice.

"Sure," I said, "where's the car?"

CHAPTER III

Prisoner

YOU'VE got to hand it to Matt Prance, bum that he is. He always wanted a pent-house and now that he was in the bucks he had a honey. It was on top of the twenty-four story Lathrop House and the rent he paid wasn't hay, even for him. He had an interior decorator do the fourteen rooms, and they were full of swell gadgets that even Prance couldn't name off-hand.

He was in the studio-living room that gave off onto an honest-to-goodness lawn. He was wearing dinner clothes with a white cummerbund and a mess jacket. A lot of gals went overboard for his swarthy lean face, his polished black hair, his slim tall figure. But one look at his gimlet eyes and his wet red mouth crossed him off my books. Any guy that would take not one dollar but maybe a million bucks cut off women don't rate with me. I had never liked him and I hated him now as he stood there. I knew he had killed Helen Dunn.

So I walked across the room, smiling broad and toothy, and stuck out my hand and said, "Well, Matt, how long since you got to send for a cheap-shot like me?"

His hand was flabby, soft, and he just placed it in mine and didn't even bother to grip. He took it away before I could bear down.

"Sit down, Chick," he said, "Curly, get him a drink and a cigar." He had a soft black voice, like oil on a macadam road.

"Make it Scotch," I said, "Bourbon makes me sick—rye, too."

He lit a cigarette. I lit the cigar. You'd have thought we were old friends until you saw our eyes.

"You said something to Big Adele about me bumping Helen Dunn," he remarked casually.

I pretended to cringe, to be scared.

"Oh, you know how it is, Matt," I answered. "I was torch-hot over her, and to find her murdered—and in my room—and me taking the rap if the cops catch me," I shrugged. "A guy loses his temper. Even me. And that fat madam casing my room didn't help either."

He passed over it, expressionless. "What made you think I bumped her, Chick?"

I shrugged again and fidgeted nervously. I hadn't been frisked yet but I knew one word from those wet red lips and I'd feed the crabs in the East River.

"She came to me all in a sweat," I told him, "and said she's spoken out of turn about a doll, Sheila Rourke, and wanted me to get her out of town."

"Yeah, and what did you do?"

"Why, she was my gal, wasn't she? I went out to get a telephone and find out the next train to Canada. When I came back she was dead, so I lammed out the window."

"What did she tell you about Sheila?"

"Nothing, only you were carrying the torch for the kid and she didn't like it."

It seemed awfully quiet in the room after that. Matt's cigarette smoke curled up his face and he half-closed one eye to keep it out. I could feel those two rod men behind me.

"And you'd rat to the police if you were picked up?"

"Hell, no! You know me, Matt, I'd keep quiet. They ain't got anything on me."

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"They'd burn you," he said, "and a hell of a lot I'd care, only you are a liar—you would beef. And Adele says she thinks you're a stoolie."

"That big, lousy—" I began.

"Shut up and sit down," he growled. His eyebrows went up at Curly. "Frisk him, Curly, we'll keep him around for a while."

"What's the idea?" I demanded. I took the frisking limply.

Matt smiled. "You're going out to the country for a rest," he said. "I don't want you picked up, and you're too dumb to dodge the dicks long."

"Are you leveling? This ain't a ride?"

"No, no," he shrugged impatiently, but his eyes made a liar out of him. I was thinking fast. There was more to this than just Helen's murder. She was important to me because I had liked her; she was important to Laird, because she could talk about the vice-ring. But if I was to be knocked off, then bigger things than dodging the rap for her kill were in the air. Getting this, I grinned a big grin of relief.

"I couldn't figure," I said, "why I should be important to you. I don't know nothing and I don't want to know nothing."

"Rat!" he couldn't stop the sneer. "Get him out of here, Curly. He makes me sick. Take him up to Green Lodge in Westport."

Curly said, "You heard—come on."

We went down the stairs to the elevator, me figuring just how far I'd let this go. A hide-out in the sticks didn't sound so good, and maybe I wouldn't even get that far. I didn't know what signal Matt had given Curly. It was a spot and I was beginning to sweat. I thought about Sheila Rourke. Maybe she was in this Green Lodge, too, and I should let this hand play itself to get to her. But Curly was a tough killer; gunning a guy was all business with him. I couldn't take the chance. And I had to make the break before we got into the car.

We came out into the lobby. It was a big joint with two exits. And as he started for the Park Avenue outlet two guys came in.

"Hey!" I squawked, and whirled and started to run. "They're two headquarters dicks. It's a pinch."

EVEN a gun like Curly wouldn't heist a guy with two bulls watching. Yet I had a funny feeling in the small of my back as I tore for the Sixty-first Street entrance.

"Hey," came Curly's voice, "they ain't—"

I was out the door. I took one glimpse as I ran east. Curly and his pal were horsing right along after me, and I put my elbows to my sides and threw my chest out and covered six feet a stride. I made Lexington Avenue and got a break when a cab turned into a westbound street just as I ran north. I grabbed the door and leaped in, with speed if not grace.

"Make the Grand Central in nothing flat—a train," I gasped.

In the Grand Central I got into a shuttle subway car, went south on the Broadway-Seventh Avenue line, twisted in the Pennsylvania Station and headed back north. I don't think my color was proper again until I turned the key in my hotel room.

I packed my bag, checked out and moved to the Admiral three blocks northeast of Broadway. Then I sat down, lit a cigarette and gave the situation a gander.

All I had gotten out of this meeting was the knowledge that I was inked in for a kill as soon as Matt could locate me. Also the doubtful lead on this Green

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Lodge in Westport. I already knew Matt was in to his tonsils in this hurdy-gurdy so his actions told me nothing new.

I called Laird and told him the situation. "I think," I concluded, "that I'll have to powder for a few days. Between the cops and Matt, a little trip to Westport might give us a lead and keep me from a nervous breakdown."

He said, "I'm glad you called. I've been trying to reach you. . . . Yes, I know. The thing is tight. But you've got to crack a safe."

"Whose?" I asked.

"Big Adele's in that three-forty-seven joint on Furthing Lane. We got her out and cased the point, but we can't get the safe open. And it's a brand new safe—a Wrigley—and she didn't have it put in to keep cheese in."

"How about a search warrant?" I asked. I didn't like macing that safe. I was too damned hot.

"By the time we got there it would be empty. She's in with the pols—and how. Listen, could you work it tonight?"

I happen to be good on safes; some I can handle with my fingers—I worked for the Acme Safe Company a year once to learn how—and others I soup. This Wrigley looks solid but I could bust it with a can opener.

"What about her?" I asked.

"Tell me what time you can make it and I'll have her picked up on a disorderly conduct charge. She won't be sprung for three hours because I'll have her shifted from station house to station house and her lawyer won't catch up. I'll have a man across the street to grab anybody who looks suspicious and is going in."

It was the best he could do—and a lot, showing how much he wanted to break the case.

I looked at my watch. It was nearly ten-thirty. "Okay," I told him. "I can be there in about an hour. I can't come back uptown because Matt will be turning stones to find me. So pick up my baggage and pay my bill at the Admiral. Meet me at two in the Grand Central Station. I'll have everything in the safe on me."

He thought a minute, said, "Swell. Incidentally, the Missing Persons Bureau has a beef about Sheila Rourke. It seems her boy friend has some dough. There's five grand posted for finding her."

"G-men in?" I growled.

"Not yet. Nobody but you and me knows it was a grab."

I hung up, lit a cigarette and emptied my baggage. I put on a rather heavy tweed suit because the shoulders were boxed and the suit made me look bigger than I was. I put on a different hat, and a pair of shoes with lifts in the heels. I found a short, stubby pipe whose stem, if you get it behind your incisors and clamp down change your mouth and face a lot. I got out the Police Regulation .38 that Pete Laird had given me. I saw that it was loaded, put a dozen loose slugs in my side pocket. I took the brief case that had my acetylene torch, soap and nitroglycerin. With the gun in a spring shoulder holster, I was all set.

The doorman said, "Cab will be here when you get down, sir."

It had to be. I couldn't walk a block now safely. I came out of the elevator into the lobby and headed straight for the door. On my left was the entrance to the Admiral's South Sea Room, a place where you drank and sat and danced and listened to Phil Rogers' swing music. Out of it came a man in tails. I saw him with one eye. Saw him start, and I swore inwardly. He kept on coming and took me by the shoulder.

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"Duck inside, Chick," he said, "I hear you're spotted and I'd certainly like to help."

CHAPTER IV

Safebreaker

WE went into the men's washroom, and Tony Sloan said, "I know you didn't kill Helen Dunn, and I want to help you."

Well, maybe he did. Anthony Sloan was a tough one to make book on. His old man made fifty millions in the Great Madness and lost sixty in the Big Wind of 1929, and shot himself out of sheer disgust. The kid had been a wild one before that: a gambler—one hundred and eighty thousand bucks in one poker game is not spinach—a Broadway playboy with a yen for red-heads. He disappeared for a time, came back and with a stake caught the rising market and somebody said he had five million now. I wouldn't know about that except he liked Broadway still, played it four ways from the jack, and I had met him maybe a dozen times.

Right now he said, "Need any money?"

His eyes, inside their rubber tires of dissipation, were kind and sympathetic.

"No," I said.

"What about a hide-out?"

"What can you offer?"

He glanced at the brief case. "Leaving town now?"

"If they'll let me."

"How about Westport? I've opened the old governor's place on Cavalry Road. Nobody would give you a tumble up there."

It was a queer coincidence that I should run into him, and he mention Westport. I kept thinking of the five grand nick for Sheila Rourke's recovery. I gave him a long look. His pale brown hair was thinning, his face was grayish from too many highballs, but he looked on the level.

"I'll do it," I said.

He got out a gold pencil and scribbled a note. "This is to the caretaker, a German named Schultz." He grinned. "You're safe as in a cellar up there. . . . And I'll be up in a few days to hear the details." He scowled. "I'd like to know who killed poor Helen."

"So would a lot of people," I tossed over my shoulder.

I got rid of the taxicab at Brooklyn Bridge entrance and walked the rest of the way. When I reached the stone steps to three forty-seven, a figure came out from behind a caged tree.

"Maney?" he whispered.

"Yeah." I took my hand off my gun.

"It's the third door on the left after you get up the stairs. Here's a key that'll fit. Adele is in the 112th Street station now and due for a move."

I recognized him as Dave Miller, a second-grade dick who was a great friend of Pete's.

"I'll fade when you come out," he said, "if anything looks bad I'll blow a whistle."

"What could happen?" I asked.

He shrugged. "Search me. But Pete says if we miss a trick on this we'll all go to the can. There's a lot of big dough involved."

He drifted back to his tree and I went inside. The place smelled of old meals, mostly ham and cabbage by the odor, and sour soup, and I wondered why a gal like Big Adele, mostly always in the bucks, should have a hide-out here. Well, in her own quarters she did herself well. It was a gaudy but expensive apartment, with silk hangings on the wall, and a canopied bed—why you need a canopied bed unless the roof leaks is beyond me—and thick Oriental rugs all

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over the floor. The safe was behind a silk tapestry on the east wall over an imitation gas fireplace.

I got a break right away; the safe was not a new one. It looked sturdy and stout to Adele, but as soon as I gave the dial a couple of twists I could hear the tumblers making odd sounds, and I knew I wouldn't need any soup. With paraffin on my fingers I began to spin it around. Two letters, three numbers, four right, one and a half left—man, that safe was just telling me how to go so I wouldn't make a mistake. I wish you could crack life and happiness as easily as I cracked that safe. By the clock I wasn't over twenty minutes—and that's good time.

The bull's-eye door swung open. There were bank books, safety deposit keys in little red cardboard holders, some assorted papers. I swept all this into my various pockets.

And then I saw something that sent a thrill through me so that I got the shakes.

In a little white jeweler's box—without a name on it—resting in white cotton were *two black pearls.*

Not really black, but a sort of bluish green. I took them in my hand and saw that about a quarter of their surface was covered with a whitish substance that might be powder or cement. Jeweler's cement.

A black pearl was found in Helen Dunn's mouth. Big Adele had been on her fat knees searching under my bed for something. I find two black pearls in her safe. Here was a clue of prime importance, and I saw a hundred buck bonus just around the corner.

But if Big Adele had killed Helen Dunn, and dropped a pearl in the doing, just what was her motive? If Helen had been murdered, as I suspected, to shut her mouth, then Matt Prance had plenty of torpedoes to do it. And Big Adele was not one to take a chance on going into that room at Sing Sing where there is only one unoccupied chair, unless she was driven by desperation or emotion. Here was something that needed a lot of investigation, and that was Pete Laird's job. I pocketed the pearls, closed the safe and prepared to go. I stood there for a second in utter darkness, getting myself together.

Then I heard the door creak slightly, and felt rather than saw it open!

I stood rigid; the sweat pouring out of me. If it was Big Adele or her friends and I was trapped I'd have to take a rap in stir to protect myself. And while a word to the governor would get me out after five months or so—who wants five months in stir? If it wasn't Big Adele, then—

Two shadows slid into the room. And slid is the word. They were low—and I knew that they *knew* I was there. Inwardly I cursed Dave Miller. Where was his whistle of warning? I couldn't reach the window. I couldn't even move.

I heard the door lock with a click. Still no sound, and with a blank wall behind them, I could no longer make out their shadows. I didn't know where they were.

I got out my gun and went to my knees. Tendons cracked as I did so and in that silence they sounded like shotgun fire. And they heard. One of them must have pressed the electric light switch near the door. Two floor lamps and a side-wall fixture blazed—and there I was, looking at Curly Slade and his torpedo friend. His friend was in front, and he had his gun partly extended, elbow crooked. His arm began to straighten and I could see in his eyes that he intended to shoot.

Curly said, "Give it to the rat, Jerry."

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HE was about half-way in that sentence when I pulled the trigger. Jerry had pulled his trigger, too, but I must have been four heart-beats ahead. For as my gun roared he gave a jump, clapped a hand to his throat and tried to scream. The gush of blood made it sound like a gargle. The bullet from his gun fanned my right ear. In that instant I remember wondering how I could hit a man in the neck when I had been aiming for a button on his vest.

What happened afterward happened fast. As he went down, still gargling, Curly snapped the light button. I heard him move but because of the noise the dying Jerry was making I couldn't tell which way. And before I could figure out his move he was on me.

He hadn't tried to use his gun for fear the flash would give him away. So we met chest to chest with a shock that knocked me kicking. But as I fell I had sense enough to roll and duck forward. And a good thing I did. He had me located by the collision and as I went down he fired three quick shots right at the spot where I should have lit. I fired up at him, a streaking flame that lit him perfectly.

And I missed! The collision had upset me, and I missed him at six feet, and him a yard broad. Before I could shoot again he literally jumped on me. Hit with one hundred and sixty-odd pounds with the intent of stunning me and then putting the muzzle of his rod to my ears. If he'd lit on my stomach that would have been the curtains. But I was on my side and took most of the weight on my shoulders. And as he lit I rolled frantically.

What happened immediately thereafter I can't tell in detail. When a man knows he's fighting for his life, he doesn't stop to ponder about it. He just explodes in frantic, instinctive resistance which doesn't leave a clear record on the memory. My gun went off, and then he had my wrist. His gun exploded and I got the arm between my ankles and rolled in a sort of scissors grip that kept the gun muzzle away from me and kept him twisted in a split. After that it was a tussle between him and me for possession of my gun.

Mind you, there was hell to pay outside. Screams and yells, and people's feet thudding, and we in there fighting without saying a word.

I got the gun loose with him still held by my scissors grip. So I didn't shoot. I banged that gun muzzle against his head with all the force a half-swing would provide. He went soft and rubbery, and I tore loose from him and raced to the window.

Not a chance that way!

I ran to the door, unlocked it and slid into the hall. As I came out I saw the ceiling light and I shot it out. Not on the first shot. It took three to hit that bulb at fifteen feet. Yeah, I got nerves just like anybody else. But in the darkness—my back to anyone down the hall—I dashed for the stairs. A man came rushing up.

Behind him were women making more noise than chickens in the produce market.

"What happened?" he gasped.

"Search me," I gasped. "I heard shooting. By Golly, somebody's been hurt. I'm going for the cops."

With that, without waiting for him to ask questions I tore through the people on the stairway. "Watch out," I yelled back. "If it's a murderer he'll shoot!"

I tore out into the night and ran all the way to Nassau Street. In front of the old *World* Building I grabbed a taxicab and snaked uptown to Grand Central.

I had time to think now and all I saw

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was trouble. I had killed a guy by the name of Jerry. Stool pigeons haven't any license to kill even in self-defense. Worse yet, *I had not* killed Curly Slade. If he got out of this—as he could easily with a clever mouthpiece—he'd tell Matt Prance that I had gunned Jerry. He'd tell him I had cracked Big Adele's safe. He'd tell him I was a stoolie as could be deduced from what had happened.

I had two black pearls but it looked as if I had swapped a harp and halo for them. I had the jitters by the time I saw Pete Laird in the Grand Central. We met by the telephone booths on the upper level, and my face must have told him what he had not already known.

And he knew this: "Dave Miller's in Bellevue with a fractured skull," he rapped. "Somebody skulled him from behind. What happened?"

I told him where I stood and began emptying my pockets. "I had to kill this Jerry," I finished. "He had his shot."

"I know," Laird replied. "He's got a record as long as an old man's beard. The hell of it is I can't square this without tipping our hand. And if we go off half-cocked on this vice business, we muff the whole play."

He pocketed what I had given him. "You'll have to scram," he decided. "You'd better hop to California for a month or so. Your usefulness to me is finished."

I didn't like that. I was in this up to my tonsils and I wanted to see the end. Helen Dunn had been something more than a friend. I said so.

Laird shook his head.

"You don't know what you're talking about," he said savagely, "we're fighting everybody in this—everybody, do you hear? Somebody tipped Prance's lawyer off where Big Adele was—and she's sprung. Somebody tipped Matt Prance the blast was out—and he's disappeared. Money is being spent plenty. If it wasn't for the black pearls that make the tie-up—" He stopped.

He stared at me, his thin kindly face suddenly taut.

"Where are the black pearls?"

"I gave them to you."

He went through the stuff. But he didn't have them. I had taken them out of the little box and put them loose in the small change pocket inside the big pocket of my coat. I searched there. I didn't find them. I searched my other pockets. They weren't there either.

I groaned. "They must have fallen out of my pocket when I was scrambling with Curly Slade." I swore viciously. "They're on the floor of Big Adele's living room.

Pete Laird jerked into action. "Then I'm on my way. She's sprung and she'll hi-tail it there to find out what's missing. If the prowl car guys got there in time, we're okay. But we've got to have them. The black pearls are the only chance of a conviction."

I followed him to the subway. He gave me two hundred dollars. "Telegraph your address and I'll wire you when to come back."

"Yeah," I said, knowing I couldn't argue with him.

When the subway doors closed on him I went back into Grand Central and bought a ticket to Westport. He hadn't seemed to understand that Helen Dunn and I had been more than friends once.

CHAPTER V

Green Lodge

TONY SLOAN had himself a place in Westport. Quarry Acres, he called it, and it spread over eighty-six acres, mostly landscaped. The house

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was a rambling log cabin of a mere twenty-eight rooms, with a big marble swimming pool, tennis courts, shooting ranges, bridle paths, stables and horses. I could have lived swell at the Ritz for a dump for a month. Adolph Schultz was the superintendent and he was a card.

"Vere do you sing or do you play der horses?" he asked at once.

I said I did neither except when shaving in the bathroom or when I got a tip on a hot one straight from the feed box.

"All ve get here is crooners or men that bet," he said. "Vell, you sleep in der blue room."

We looked over the blue room which was a honey, and as we came in the housekeeper was fixing it up. Taking out a woman's negligee, powder, hairpins.

I said, "Have you had company?"

"No," she said, "but the last guest here was a girl. A red head." She said it with a finality that was supposed to be self-revelatory. I shrugged. What Tony Sloan did was his business, and after all the guy was doing me a favor.

Schultz brought the New York newspapers every morning so I followed the progress of the hunt for me. And following it I saw the terrific influence exerted by the higher-ups in this vicering. For instance, the district attorney was preparing evidence to indict me before a grand jury on the charge of murdering Jerry Morani. How did he know it? The only man in that room was Curly Slade, a professional killer.

And yet this is what I found: my finger prints were on the wall safe. That was a lie. I had paraffined my fingers. But Curly had told Matt Prance it was me; Matt had told the proper guy, and the evidence was being *framed*. An envelope addressed to me was found. I had no envelope and if I had had it, I wouldn't had dropped it. Three witnesses were found who had seen me flee downstairs with the gun in my hand, shouting, "I got him!"

Pretty bald, eh? Well, when big bucks are involved, anything goes. I began to see that when Sheila Rourke was grabbed, it started the single thread which was going to unball a ball of rottenness. Helen Dunn was killed. Then I killed Jerry Morani, and the end was not in sight.

Meantime, after loafing around three days, passing cops in downtown Westport, I began to make inquiries about Green Lodge. I pretended to go for long walks, and found native New England farmers who couldn't be in on this racket who could tell me where it was.

Good Hill Road, they said, about four miles cross-country. I walked that, and gave the place a gander. It was a big sprawling New England farmhouse hanging to the edge of a pond, hidden by a high hedge and great beautiful maple trees. It had apple green shutters, but the blinds were mostly pulled, and a farmer farther down the road told me it belonged to some artist, now in California, and was closed except for the caretaker. He added, however, that New York friends occasionally opened the guest house in back.

That night at dinner, Schultz told me Tony Sloan had telephoned he was coming up on a late train in the morning. So I knew if I was going to look over this Green Lodge tonight was the night.

I sat upstairs putting on a pair of rubber soled sneaks and thinking that I must be getting sappy in my old age, running a risk like this. Put me down for a fool, and an egotistic fool if you like, but I had a hunch then that if I foozled this play Helen Dunn's murder would go forever unsolved. Why? Well, Pete Laird is a honey of a dick; but after all a detective can be headed

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off, shunted to one side by politics. But I couldn't. The only thing that could shunt me was fear.

Did I have it? Sure: but I kept on dressing in dark clothes, looking to my .38. Any time a guy tells you he walks smiling into danger put him down for a liar. It's the guy who has cold sweats but keeps on taking the risk that is dangerous.

I told Schultz I was going to the movies.

"Vell," he said, "you don't get into any trouble there."

"I'll take your little Ford."

"All right, only don't stay der taproom drinking peer. Herr Sloan comes he just now calls and says, at half past der twelve. I go to meet him."

For a moment I was tempted to wait and take Sloan with me. But the idea passed. He was soft and pasty and no guy to have at your back. And, anyway, he might not like me getting myself shot all over the countryside. I drove the car around by the main macadam and parked a quarter of a mile from Green Lodge. I walked across hayfields to come at the house from behind. There were no lights in the main house, but the guest house glowed with three yellow windows. Thank the Lord, there were no dogs.

THE one window was opened and screened about waist high up, and I sneaked up on this and peered in.

I felt my skin go goose pimples! Not five feet away from me, his back half-turned, was Curly Slade. And mixing himself a highball in front of the fire place was Matt Prance.

Curly Slade's voice broke the stillness.

"I'm tellin' you, Matt, the dicks ain't got the pearls. And they wasn't in the room. That rat, Maney, got away with them."

"But if you say he's a stool why didn't he turn them in?"

"Use your head," growled Slade, "them two things is worth a grand each, according to you. Can you see that guy turning in two grand worth of pearls? I can't. Anyway, he don't know how important they are."

Matt Prance laughed coldly. "He won't either. We put the blocks to him tomorrow."

"Leave the job to me," urged Slade. "I owe him a couple I'd be glad to pay off."

Matt Prance nodded. "Did Adele say she was coming out?"

"Yeah. She's driving. Ought to be here about eleven."

They paused to drink. I crouched there thinking harder than I ever had in my life. How could they knock me off if they didn't know where I was? And if they did know, how did they find out? For an instant of horror I thought they might know I was outside, were talking for my benefit to hold me there until somebody surprised me.

I sneaked away from there fast toward a sunken garden. I went around this and toward the graveled driveway that led from the road to the main house. I knew, as surely as I knew anything, that Sheila Rourke was captive somewhere close. I started toward the main house.

And a guy came out of the bushes that lined the driveway and hit me like a ton of brick. My hand streaked to my gun, but a lot of good that did. His right arm went around my neck and crooked down on my windpipe. His left seized my right wrist and bent it back in a hammerlock until his knee took me in the middle of the back and almost paralyzed me. I haven't been so efficiently handled in years.

"What you doin' here?"

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A strange voice. I yielded limply to relieve the pressure of his arm against my throat.

"Have a heart," I gasped. "I ran out of gas down the road, and I was just coming to see if I could borrow a gallon to get into town."

The pressure didn't relax. "I didn't hear you come up the driveway."

"Well," I said, "it's late, and I didn't see any lights except in the caretaker's house"—I nodded to the guest house—"and I wanted to see him and not wake people up."

"It sounds screwy," he said, and I knew then he was one of Matt Prance's guns. But the pressure did relax somewhat. "I think I'll run you around to the house and let them give you a gander."

I went cold all over, and chuckled hard like a man who takes no offense.

"Take me anywhere, mister, where I can get gas. I don't want to sleep in the old bus tonight."

He had a small flashlight, and he tried to hold me with one hand while he flicked it on to look me over. He didn't know me, thank goodness, and he sort of went for my yarn. As he was pocketing the flashlight, I let him have it.

I hooked with my right, and whirling with the punch I kicked him in the groin hard enough to split him in two. As he went down I leaped on him, drawing my gun and slashed him across the temple with the muzzle and barrel. He croaked, sprawled all soft.

Quickly now I dragged him into the bushy hedge and frisked him. I took the flashlight and a short-nosed automatic, a long-bladed knife and a slungshot off him. He was loaded for bear. I tied him with his own necktie and mine and stuffed his mouth with his and my handkerchief and bound it there with a piece off my shirt tail. But I knew, even as I did this, that he'd hear the birdies pipe a long time before he knew what hit him.

He had a set of keys, about eight of them. I grabbed these and started for the main house. Two dollars would get you fifty that Sheila Rourke was in there somewhere. As I tested out the keys on the side door I had a hunch. I figured Helen Dunn was wrong: Sheila Rourke wasn't grabbed because Matt Prance was soft on her. He liked dough too much to take a risk like that.

She had been grabbed because she knew too much, and Prance or somebody else was too soft on her to have her killed.

Don't ask me how I hunched this. It was the one pattern that made sense.

The door opened and I went into the house. It didn't smell musty with old air as if it had been long closed. There was the perfume of fresh flowers in it. Only it wasn't from flowers. It was from a woman. I traced it to the next room, turned left, missed it and came back. It led to the south end of the house where an addition had been put on. The door here was locked.

I rapped, heard nothing, and went to work with my bunch of keys. The fifth one fitted. The door opened under my pressure and a blaze of light came out. I stared into a brightly lit room, magnificently furnished. And standing in the middle of it, holding onto a chair was Sheila Rourke!

CHAPTER VI

Escape!

I SHUT the door to keep the light from showing outside. The air inside was moist and cool, air-conditioned; there weren't any windows and the door slam sounded flat and dis-

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tant—the way sounds sound when you're in a sound-proof box. I turned back to her.

She recognized me all right, and her nose was up and her mouth pinched.

"So you're in on it, too," she said.

"In on what?"

"You know," she blazed, "and Helen used to say you were pretty decent."

"Maybe I am," I told her, "I wouldn't know about that. Anyway, kid, got anything here to take along? We're scramming."

She laughed. "I'm not going!"

She didn't have hustler's eyes; they were violet and big and full of hatred and contempt, and old-fashioned Irish temper.

"Listen," I said carefully, "Helen Dunn is dead. Matt Prance had her knocked off. You're going to get it, too, and so am I if I'm caught around here. I've got a place to take you—over to Green Lodge. Then you can talk."

"I'm not going," her voice rang out, "and I wouldn't tell you anything. Nor them either. You're in just as deep as the others and they sent you to find out what I know. But I won't tell you."

I went straight over to her and she lifted the chair and tried to swing it at my head. I caught the swing and jerked it away.

"Get onto yourself," I growled, "I'm here trying to help you because you were a friend of Helen's—because I want to know what you know."

Silently she tried to scratch my eyes out. No fooling, she was just a filly, one hundred and eight pounds maybe, but she pulled and hauled and struck at me, her voice sobbing. I finally got an arm around her, and slapped her across the face.

"Stop being hysterical, for cat's sake," I said.

As quickly as she had fought she went limp on me, not senseless, just a dead load that defied me getting her out. I was sore all the way through by this time, and I slapped her again.

"I can't get you out without Matt Prance seeing and hearing, if you're going to be like this."

"You get me outside," she cried fiercely, "and I'll tell the world what you all did with poor little Ethel Morey."

This didn't mean a thing to me except that she knew all about the inside chute of the girl-racket.

"When we get outside you can unload about Ethel Morey," I told her, "now come on, and if you peep loud it's curtains for both of us."

She was limp in my arms. But I managed to cut the switch and get the door open, and get her into the dark part of the house. When we reached the door through which I entered a pair of headlights blazed up the driveway. That would be Big Adele, and damned if they didn't stop by the side door. I was trapped.

"Now, you fool," I whispered, "just beef and see where we land. That's Big Adele, and Prance and Curly Slade are out there, and one of Matt's men is tied up in the bushes. I think they're coming in here."

They were. But before they reached the door, a funny sort of shout came from down the road. I prayed in an unprayerful voice. That would be the guy I bagged up. He had rid himself of the gag. Before somebody cut the headlights, I saw Curly Slade, gun out, run in that direction. What did I do now?

I didn't know the house, but I figured there must be a front entrance somewhere and I dragged Sheila in that direction. We bumped into furniture and

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groped for doors, and by the time I reached a musty front room I heard voices outside.

Then Matt Prance said, "He's inside. Watch out. He's got Tim's rod."

"It's Maney," came Curly's voice. "Let me get the heel!"

I was fumbling with the keys, trying to find one to fit a lock I couldn't see. Seconds seemed centuries and I was steeling my will not to shiver and not to get so anxious that I wasted time. Yet as I worked I thought about one thing: how did they know I was there? I mean, that it was me who had bagged this guy called Tim?

Meantime, the conversation had one good effect. Sheila finally got it through her stubborn red head that I was leveling. After I got the door unlocked I handed her Tim's gun.

"Whatever you see," I whispered, "shoot at the biggest part and knock it over. They ain't going to kiss us if they catch us."

"I'm not afraid," she whispered, "and I'm sorry. Before we go I'd better tell you that—"

I clapped a hand over her mouth. Something moved out there in the darkness. I didn't see it. I heard it.

There was star shine and the funny sort of light you get on a clear night. I could make out trees, and the sheen of the pond to the right, and a piled stone wall. Beyond the wall—about six feet high—was the road. And the noise came from between me and the stone wall.

We went down the steps in a crouch. It's funny how your mind works at such times. I should have been tense, quivering, straining in the darkness to see a movement to shoot at. Maybe I was, yet my mind was asking me just what the legal way was of getting Pete Laird up here to round this gang of rats up. I was wondering what he'd say over the telephone as soon as I called him from Tony Sloan's.

And all the time the prickly heat was coming out on my skin and my hand on my gun was cold and damp. We were nearly to the fence when the shot blasted. The slug went through my pants, guttered along my thigh, nicked the edge of the bone and tore on out. The impact turned me part way around, just as I fired at the flash. Sheila's gun smashed in my ear.

And I cursed because the flash of her gun lit my retina, blotting out the other, and so bright was the flash that the darkness was darker and I could only see the memory of her gun's flash and nothing else. I gave her a push toward the wall, and went to my knees.

"Go on," I groaned, "they got me. Run."

AS I moaned I moved to the right, and a shot roared. I fired at the flash this time, about a foot below it, and I fired twice, squeezing off carefully. I don't know if I hit. Then from the right feet were thumping on the ground and I had to turn.

My thigh was numb now and I stood up to find Sheila half-way to the wall, stopped, her gun lifted. She fired three times toward the thumping feet. Well, it was a break for me all right because she drew their fire and I got over the intervening ground while the guns roared. I got to her just as she staggered, half-whirled and went rubber.

I caught her, practically threw her over the fence. My hand was sticky and I cursed. She was hit, and dead, and what she knew she couldn't say. I started over the fence myself. As I said, the flashes blinded me, and I never saw anybody on my right until a hand clawed at me and a gun appeared al-

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most in my face. I don't know how I knocked it up, but I must have, for when the sheet of flame came out of it, my hat went flooey as the slug hit it and I had a streak of blistered flesh above my right eye where the flames burned.

I saw by the flash who held the gun. Curly Slade. He tried to pivot on his hold on me to fire again. But I was pivoting too. And my gun muzzle hit him square in the mouth just as I squeezed off the trigger.

All I could see was an opened mouth, lit as if an electric light were inside of it. I could see his tongue and a little thing—the palate—hanging down, and the light of the blaze coming through the transparency of his cheeks. Then he was gone backward, and the odd position I had pivoted into to get the shot off, plus his letting go of me cost me my balance and I went head over heels over the wall. My outstretched hands rubbed against the silk of Sheila's legs. I got her around the waist, and did the only thing possible, moved along the protection of the wall in the direction my car was.

There were at least four shots that blasted behind me but none of them came close. They were shooting at shadows. The goldenrod and weeds were high along the wall, and I must have made noise. Yet they didn't find me.

All during that retreat, my brain was keeping up two lines of thought as if I were two different guys: one watching what the other did. Sheila was limp in my arms, my leg was numb except for hot blood running down and filling my loose sock. I got her in the car and found a slug had given her a permanent part right up the middle of her red hair. I started to laugh, high-pitched in relief and batted myself across the cheek.

Then I drove down the highway and stopped at a farmhouse this side of the Weston road. A farmer named Blanchard let me in, looking queer and perplexed as he saw the bloody marks my right hoof left.

I said, "Motor accident. Got to use your telephone."

He took the explanation and led me into the kitchen where the telephone was, but I could see he thought I was a liar after Pete Laird was on the wire.

"Listen," I said, "I know the whole set-up. I got Sheila. She's got a skull groove from a slug. Curly Slade met with an accident and hasn't got any head. Big Adele is up here, so is Matt Prance. And that isn't all. You can break this case tonight if you can scram up here in a run."

I knew it wasn't legal for a New York dick to go pinching people in Connecticut. So did he. But say, this for him, he never hesitated.

"I'm coming as fast as a prowl car can bring me. Say an hour and ten minutes. Maybe less. We'll fix it with the Connecticut cops later. Where'll I find you?"

"At Tony Sloan's—and hurry!"

I had most of the two hundred bucks that Pete had given me still in my pocket. I peeled off fifty and gave them to the farmer.

"Listen," I said, "my sister is outside, badly hurt in the accident. I want a doctor for her. I want you to keep her here while I go see how the other people are doing."

He looked at the money and said, "I don't like this for a cent."

But I was out bringing Sheila in. By this time his wife and grown up daughter were down nosing around, and when they saw Sheila all bloody and pretty at that, they cried out and got her to bed, and started up the fire to heat hot water.

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I gave the farmer a stare.

"This is on the up-and-up," I said, "and there'll be fifty more where this one came from if you take good care of her and get a doctor."

Before he could refuse or ask questions I limped out to the car and bore down on the accelerator. I drove straight to Tony's. Schultz lived over the garage and heard me come in and stuck his head out of the window.

"That movie was out hours ago," he said, "vere you been?"

"Picking daisies," I said. "Did Tony come?"

"Yah. He is in house askin' fer you."

I walked down the driveway, past the swimming pool to the main lodge which was all lit up. I went in. Tony, still in dinner clothes, was downing a tall cold drink.

His hand was shaking and he dropped the drink as I came in. As he bent over to pick up the glass—it fell on a rug and didn't break—a button on his shirt popped.

He said, "For Pete's sake, man, look at your foot. It's all blood."

I put my back to the fireplace, facing him. I took out my gun carelessly and then on a sudden leveled it at his fatty middle.

"Yeah," I said, "so was Helen Dunn all bloody, Sloan. Get them up."

That's all I remember except a violent blow that hit me in the mouth and the lights went out and the floor came up and socked me in the mush.

CHAPTER VII

Racket's End

I FOUND out what had happened when I woke up. I had twenty different toothaches and a little exploration by my tongue explained the reason. A slug had been fired at my head and it hadn't missed. It had struck one side of my mouth—the left first, I think—and gone through taking gum and two back molars with it. Going out it had done just about as badly, taking a new gold inlay and a wisdom tooth and a quarter of an inch of the gum. The shock must have put me out before I heard the report of the gun which shows you just how quick you fold up when hit, because the bullet only beats the sound at such short range by a fraction of a second.

Anyway, I had a honey of a headache, and I found myself trussed up like a mummy in ropes and reposing in a couch swing on the screened-in terrace of Tony Sloan's place. Right across from me was Tony Sloan and Matt Prance.

I spat out a mouthful of blood and some fragments of my lost teeth.

Tony Sloan was on me like a flash. "All right, you rat," he growled, "where is she?"

I wondered how long I had been out. There was no mercy in his face, nor in Prance's either. They were keeping me alive hoping to recapture Sheila. After that—curtains. So I was bold.

"What do you want to do?" I said. "Murder her the way you murdered Helen Dunn? The next time you bump somebody don't bent over in front of them to see if they're dead, Sloan. Then one of your pearl studs won't pop and land in a dead mouth."

Prance said, "So that's where it landed?"

Sloan struck me across my wounded face and the pain almost made me sick.

"Where is she?" he demanded.

Before I could say anything, Big Adele came in with a rush like a freight train making up ten minutes schedule.

"Darling," she cried to Sloan,

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" don't stick around. Let's go. We can—"

She had her hands on him caressing him, her face not vicious any more, but tender and soft. Funny what love can do to a woman. She was as bad as they come, but she adored this fat chump who had gone into the girl-racket to stage a money come-back.

Sloan thrust her aside. His face was white with pink spots, his eyes blazed and he was tense enough to explode.

" Where is she?" he said thickly.

" She ought to be in New York by now," I said.

He hit me again and I gagged with the pain. Adele kept tugging at him.

" Please, Tony, if you stay here, we're all caught."

" Get away from me," he snarled, whirling on her. " I gave you those studs to get rid of. And you, you cheap rat, you kept them in your safe because they were worth a couple of grand."

" No, no, honest, I didn't, Tony, darling," she cried. " I kept them because they were yours. I wanted to throw them away. But I couldn't. Tony—Tony—"

He walloped her, but she didn't make any come-back. She just started to cry and Prance edged her aside. He was cold, but scared, and very dangerous.

" Let me go to work on him, Tony," he said, " Sheila was wounded and she didn't go far."

Prance went to work. He put cigarette coals against the bullet holes in my cheeks. He shoved pins under my fingernails. I couldn't take it. If I could have fainted I'd have been all right. But the pain got so awful I had to do something.

" She's at a farmhouse," I yelled. " I don't know the name. Not far from the Green Lodge. I could take you there."

Again the pin under my forefinger and I began to vomit.

Sloan yelled, " Take a chance he's leveling. Get some of those ropes off him and let's go."

Well, I got a break then. I was dizzy with pain, and so weak from it I could hardly stand. So when they unbound me all except my hands they did the job hastily. I could feel plenty of slack on my wrists. But it didn't do me any good because I was then too weak to make a fight if I freed myself.

Prance got his right arm under my shoulders and started to drag me to the door. I was leaning heavily on him. Adele was ahead and Tony Sloan was using his left hand to help drag me on my right.

Adele reached the door to hold it open, and she gave a quick, smothered scream.

" Somebody's coming—dicks—he's tricked you, Tony!"

Headlights came up the bend in the driveway. Well, you couldn't blame poor Pete Laird for that. I hadn't told him that Tony was the king-pin in the vice ring because I wasn't sure when I called. So he figured this only for my hide-out and came steaming in with all lights blazing.

But coming the way he did, he trapped Tony Sloan and Matt Prance and Big Adele. And practically signed my death warrant.

I told you I was weak. I was. A second before I could scarcely bear my weight on my feet. But the instant she screamed I knew my number was up. They'd kill me, shoot it out and make a getaway. But killing me would be first.

From some place—fear of death, of course—I got a surge of strength. I jerked my right hand loose from Sloan's grip and it streaked across and

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inside Matt Prance's coat and came out with his automatic. Don't ask me to tell you how that hand got out of the loosened cord on my wrist. Maybe I *wished* it out.

ANYWAY, I had a gun. I was loose and I hurled myself backward just as Tony Sloan took a slug at me with a gun muzzle. He missed and followed up with a swinging arc to mow me down. Prance was leaping at me like a tiger. Big Adele was fishing in a purse, fumbling hysterically with a pearl-handled rod of some kind.

I went on down flat on my back, and I knew by the way I hit that I wasn't going to get up. All the strength I had had been spent in one effort. But the gun, heavy as it was in my hand, was swinging and I pulled the trigger and held it down.

The slugs played a tap dance on Tony Sloan's carcass and as each one hit him he jerked backward like a marionette on strings. He faded out of my sight just as Prance lit on me grabbing for my gun wrist. How he missed I don't know. But the rest of him hit me.

His wolfish face was in mine, his stinking breath hot on my face, his body pinning me. I did the only thing I could with his fingers tearing the flesh of my neck. I rammed the gun around somehow to bring it into his body and I pulled the trigger.

I don't remember hearing the explosion. But I smelled burning flesh and cloth and he wasn't trying to claw me any more. And he wasn't dead either. He just rolled over with a surprised look on his face and said jerkily, "I'm hit!"

Well, I was done. Adele would have killed me only Pete nailed her with a right cross that knocked her kicking against the fireplace screen, and a couple of uniformed cops took a knife away from Matt Prance—a knife I hadn't even seen him draw.

Pete gave me a shot of Bourbon that was four fingers tall. I hate Bourbon but that tasted like nectar and it hit me like a dose of cocaine. I snapped out of it and took an interest.

Pete listened while I belched. "Sheila's got all the facts. She got wise to Tony Sloan when a gal named Ethel Morey was grabbed. I don't know what happened to Ethel, but Sheila can tell you. Tony was nuts about Sheila. He didn't kill her, but held her prisoner in a sound-proof room in a joint he owns on Good Hill Road. Tony personally killed Helen—it was his black pearl stud that popped into Helen's mouth. I have a hunch he killed her because he was holding out on Matt Prance in the vice-ring take and was afraid she'd beef to Matt, not to the cops.

"He told Matt he had plugged her to keep her from ratting to the cops. You can check this with Matt's story—and Sheila's.

"The reason I think this is that he was trying to capture me without Matt Prance knowing he had me. I'd slid away from Prance, changed my hotel, and ran into Sloan. He played me for a sucker and sent me up here—maybe to finish me off in his own way.

"I never suspected this until Prance told Sloan about me cracking Big Adele's safe and getting the pearls, and then Sloan must have broken down and said he had me at his place in Westport. That was the only way I could account for Prance knowing where I was, which he did. Also it was the fact that made me decide Sloan was the guy behind the throne."

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My mouth hurt like hell. But I said, "I think Sheila knows where Sloan's real books are which is why he grabbed her. Anyway, she's witness enough to convict them all."

Well, that was about all except for two things. First, was the two black pearls. Adele didn't have them; they hadn't been found on the floor. So Laird went through my coat and found they'd gone through the lining and were down in the coat skirt.

Second, something had to be done about Sloan's kill. I had shot him, and stool pigeons have no right to shoot anybody, crooks or otherwise. Also, if I had to stand a trial for homicide—even if self-defense worked—I'd appear as a stoolie. And I just couldn't go for that.

But Pete said, "I can fix it so you don't have to appear at all. Prance and Adele won't beef at their trials, and later they'll burn for murder, so that shuts their mouth. Sheila's testimony and the black pearl are all we need for conviction. So you can scram to Canada and take a rest."

"They're going to ask," I said, pointing to Sloan's corpse, "who fired the slugs into that mouse."

"I'll fix it," said Pete.

He got out his gun, put two handkerchiefs over the muzzle and bent over Sloan's body. I'd hit Sloan four times in the chest and the stomach—not bad shooting for a guy out on his feet. Swiftly Pete held the muzzle of the gun to each wound on the angle my slugs had penetrated, and pulled the trigger. His bigger slugs grooved out the holes my bullets had first made and thus put me in the clear.

"Sloan was resisting arrest and I killed him, as ballistics can prove," he said. "Curly Slade and that other punk you killed will go down as gang murders—unsolved."

"Suits me," I said.

I went to the Norwalk Hospital as a motor accident case and loafed three weeks. By that time, Pete had sent me twenty-five hundred bucks which Sheila's boy friend paid for finding her. Sheila went back home and married the guy. I took off for Montreal where a check for my expenses and twenty bucks a day pay reached me.

I looked that pay check over plenty, and thought what I had done to earn it, and what it represented. Believe it or not I cashed the check and put the money in the cash box at the Church of St. Anthony.

Helen Dunn had been more than a friend to me once.

P.S. Matt Prance and Adele Riggs burned.

I TAKE AN ALKA-SELTZER WHEN I HAVE AN ACHING HEAD.
YOU'D BETTER GET ME ONE, OR ELSE, I'LL HAVE TO GO TO BED.
HOW COME YOU NEVER GET A COLD? I WISH YOU'D PUT ME WISE.
OH I'M JUST PLAYING SAFE THIS YEAR—I ALKA-SELTZER-IZE.
HEADACHE
COLDS
Be Wise—Alkalize
Alka-Seltzer
Alka-Seltzer Makes a sparkling alkalizing solution containing an analgesic (acetyl salicylate). You drink it and it gives prompt, pleasant relief for Headaches, Sour Stomach, Distress after Meals, Colds and other minor Aches and Pains
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"No! No! Don't come, Tom!"

A Hundred a Minute

By J. Lane Linklater

THE beautifully appointed limousine swept along the highway with noiseless speed. A few miles ahead were the outskirts of a town. Neither Paul C. Pitt, who was the handsome gentleman in the tonneau, nor Dan, who was Pitt's huge bullock-headed chauffeur, knew the name of the town, nor anything about it. The entrance into a strange place, however, was almost a daily experience with them, since their incessant traveling was rarely hampered by any set purpose.

Paul C. Pitt Had a Balloon to Burst — and a Murder to Solve — So He Taught the Local Cops the Rudiments of the Art of Catching a Killer

In a little while, at the entrance of the town, they were passing under a portal which proclaimed its name: Slocan.

Pitt leaned forward. "I think we'll stop here, Dan."

Dan was not so much surprised as worried. "Gee, boss," he argued, "it ain't noon yet. We got lots of time to go on—"

"But it's a delightful little city,

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Dan," Pitt insisted pleasantly. "Gardens around the houses and trees along the streets."

"And no dough in sight," remarked Dan cynically. "Anyhow, these small towns are dynamite, boss. Everybody looks at you. And these village cops pass the word along from one place to another. Now, maybe that sheriff guy we ditched a couple a days ago has—"

"Stop right here, Dan," said Pitt serenely.

They were now on the main business street of Slocan. Dan slid the limousine against the curb.

"I don't get it, boss," Dan grumbled. "There ain't a thing doing here. This burg is asleep."

"Slumber," Pitt remarked, "is a mask for nightmares."

"Yeah?" said Dan bewildered. "That don't make sense to me. Anyhow, if you find a nightmare, there'll be some cops in it. And it's kinda reckless—"

"Reckless?" repeated Pitt. "No, Dan. Not reckless. Daring, perhaps, but not reckless. There's a big difference. The reckless person bids goodby to reason and acts on blind impulse. The daring person sets his mind on the achievement of some worthwhile aim, keeps his wits about him, takes the risk boldly but with a steady hand and a clear head."

"You're getting way outer my pasture," Dan mumbled unhappily. "Anyhow, we're here now, and how you gonna find out what's going on, if anything?"

Pitt smiled.

"There's a pool hall down the street," he said. "Pool halls are the sounding-boards of gossip. I'll mingle a bit, Dan."

He stepped out, strode casually away. Dan, crouched behind the wheel, noted with concern that, as usual, Pitt's tall graceful form was like a magnet, attracting the gaze of everyone within sight; both men and women, but especially women.

PITT vanished through a doorway. Dan's giant form sank down, as if he would conceal himself behind the wheel. He was fearful of small cities, where Pitt and he were so conspicuous, although Pitt invariably preferred them.

And, in his heart, Dan did not doubt that Pitt would be able to lift some obscure plank that concealed a skeleton of human drama. The few who knew Pitt well ascribed to him an amazing ability to sense troubled turbulence beyond the blank walls of serenity.

Pitt was back in twenty minutes. He was smiling. "I've found something interesting, Dan. *Very* interesting."

Dan groaned. "Okay. So we're stuck here in this—"

"For a little while, yes. Two days ago a man was killed. He was a stranger in town, had been here only a few hours. Registered at the hotel as Bill Stark. Walked out south of town and stood on the edge of a bluff. A local chap came along and threw him over the bluff. Anyhow, that's the story."

"Murder, huh?" Dan said huskily. "That means plenty trouble—a good set-up to keep out of, boss."

"But there's the human interest angle, Dan," contended Pitt. "You see, the local lad admits he was there, but denies touching the stranger. However, another man—one of Slocan's most substantial citizens—says he saw it done very clearly. So the local boy was being taken to the county seat, thirty miles away, under arrest."

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"So," suggested Dan sarcastically, "maybe we go to the county seat now and see this—"

"By no means, Dan. The boy, whose name was Tom Snow, escaped on the way, and hasn't been seen since."

"So maybe we go look for him, huh?"

Pitt smiled again. "We can at least see two people. One of them is this Mr. August Wiffing, the man who says he saw the whole thing."

"Yeah? How about the other guy?"

"The other guy," Pitt chided him, "is not a guy. It's a young lady named Bess Tolly. She was Tom's sweetheart, and she is very badly upset; so much so, in fact, that she absolutely refuses to see anyone!" Pitt's gaze was almost ecstatic. "Beautiful case, isn't it?"

"Beautiful, hell!" muttered Dan. "It's full of trouble, boss. And where's the dough in it? A few days ago you put the bite on a guy for twenty-seven hundred bucks, but you've given away a grand here and five hundred there and—"

"To very deserving people, Dan." He thought a moment. "Perhaps we'd better see Bess Tolly first."

"If she'll let you," Dan said dubiously.

"True," agreed Pitt. "Bess is originally from way out in Denver, and has only one relative here. She lives in a small white house on the edge of town. It's at the end of Poplar Street, the second street east from here."

Dan started the limousine. In a few minutes they were parked in front of the small white house.

Pitt sat and looked at the house pensively. "Neat little place isn't it, Dan? Bess lives here alone. She teaches school, but yesterday she refused to attend—refused to leave the house."

"Nuts about the kid that was pinched, huh?" said Dan.

"Very much in love with him, Dan. Some women are like that. Well, I'll see what I can do," he chuckled. "I'm inclined to think there'll be action very quickly."

He strolled up the garden walk to the low front porch, snapped the old-fashioned knocker briskly, and waited. There was no response. He knocked again, and presently a third time.

A SCRAPING sound to his left drew his attention. Just above the porch was a window. Someone was pulling down the upper section. The face of a girl appeared. It was a pretty face, sensitive, thoughtful. The rather large brown eyes were at once troubled and wary, and they were gazing at the handsome gentlman on the porch in amazement.

The girl's voice, a little shaky, came over the top of the window: "What do you want, sir?"

"My name is Pitt," said Pitt, very graciously. "Paul C. Pitt. I'm an attorney—from Denver," he added, although he could just as easily been a diamond magnate from Africa. "I'm calling to see you, Miss Tolly, on a matter of business."

The girl hesitated. "What business?"

"The disposition of the estate of a distant relative of yours. You were remembered in the will." He shrugged slightly. "It isn't much, a mere five hundred dollars—but I have the money with me."

The girl seemed undecided. "Just a minute, please," she said presently.

She vanished. Pitt waited. It was at least three minutes before he could

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hear a bolt being drawn, and the rasping of a key inside. The door opened.

"Please come in," the girl said timidly.

Pitt stepped in. The girl quickly snapped the door shut, locked it.

"What is it?" she asked. "I didn't expect a legacy."

Pitt reflected a moment. "My dear girl," he said then, "will you please look out of the window—at my car?"

Bess Tolly gazed at him wonderingly, then turned her head toward the window. Pitt drew an automatic from his pocket, and when the girl turned to look at him again, it was directed straight at her.

Involuntarily, she shrank back, screamed: "Oh! Tom! Tom!"

Pitt remained motionless.

Then the girl cried, frantically: "No! No! Don't—don't come, Tom!"

But from elsewhere in the house came footsteps, rushing, pounding. A door was flung open. A young man hurtled into the room, his eyes wild, his face pale, his towseled hair in disorder. His fists were clenched, although his build was frail, and his good-looking face was naturally mild.

For a moment he stopped, as if preparing to pounce on Pitt.

But suddenly Pitt laughed softly, flipped up the gun, demonstrated its empty chambers. "Nothing to worry about, my boy. I can assure you that I mean no harm."

The girl and the young man stared at each other.

"I—I'm sorry, Tom," cried the girl. "Now I've done it!"

Tom put his arm about her. "Don't worry—"

"Good advice," Pitt said kindly. "You see, I had a feeling that there was some special reason why Miss Tolly refused to go on with her work at school." Pitt studied the young man. "I'm a little surprised, however, that the police haven't searched this house for you."

"Why, I—well, they didn't have any idea I'd come here," he stammered. "They thought I'd get as far away from Slocan as possible."

"And anyhow," the girl put in, "my uncle is the police chief, and he wouldn't suspect *me*. But what do you want?"

PITT chuckled. "I had to get in here to talk to you. And I was sure that, with circumstances as they are, you would feel the need of money quite badly and would not turn down an opportunity to obtain five hundred dollars so quickly. And I regret that it was necessary to frighten the young lady in order to bring you out of hiding, Tom!"

Tom Snow spoke with an effort: "Who are you?"

"I," said Pitt, "am *not* an attorney. I'm a balloon-buster."

"A—a what?"

"There are men in this world," explained Pitt, "who are human balloons. They are swollen up with their own importance, but there's not much inside. And, even as a small boy, I loved to stick pins in balloons and watch them explode."

"But I don't understand what that has to do with us," protested Tom Snow.

"From what I've heard," said Pitt, "I'm inclined to think that Mr. Wiffing, the eye-witness of the murder of which you're accused, is a human balloon—and I'd like to stick a pin in him."

The girl spoke in a strained voice: "You must be joking, sir. And we can't appreciate jokes just now. Be-

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sides, Mr. Wiffing is a really important man. I don't like him, but he's a big man here in Slocan."

Pitt became grave. "I can quite understand that. But. Mr. Wiffing is the key to your trouble. Suppose Tom here is recaptured, as he is sure to be, and Mr. Wiffing insists that he saw Tom throw Bill Stark over the cliff?"

"I know," muttered Tom. "That's why I took a chance and ran away. But then I got to thinking that I was leaving Bess all alone, and sneaked back. I've been wanting to give myself up again, and fight it out, but Bess won't let me."

"What chance would Tom have," the girl said bitterly, "against Mr. Wiffing?"

"Precisely," said Pitt. "And of course, you're practical enough to realize that you must work with me, now that I know Tom's here."

The two looked at each other, obviously uncertain.

"But what," queried Tim, "do you want—"

"Tell me what happened," Pitt said.

"There's not much to tell," Tom said hopelessly. "The other evening I had been visiting a farmer friend of mine, and walked back by way of Craven's Bluff, about a mile south of town. A man was standing by the edge of the bluff, a stranger. He was looking the other way. I said 'Good evening' to him. He turned around quickly, slipped and fell over the bluff.

"I stared over the bluff. A moment later I heard someone call. It was Mr. Wiffing. He was running from the road, which was about fifty yards from the bluff. He came up to me and asked what the matter was. It seems he had just come up the road in his car. Well, I told him about the man falling over the bluff. He told me to run for a doctor. I got back with the doctor in about twenty minutes. We found that Mr. Wiffing had climbed down the bluff to where the man was lying. The man had broken his neck and was dead."

"Interesting," murmured Pitt. "The dead man was taken back to town, of course."

"Yes. And then I got the surprise of my life, When we got back to town, Mr. Wiffing, without warning, accused me of throwing the man over the bluff! He said he had been driving along the road slowly, heard my voice, stopped, noticed that I was having an argument with the man. He said he was just about to get out of his car and help me when he saw me deliberately hurl the man over!"

"That's the full story?"

"THAT'S all of it, except that the dead man was from Detroit, and it happens I made a trip to Detroit not long ago." The boy's voice broke. "People here don't like Mr. Wiffing, but nobody can believe he would accuse me unjustly and without reason."

"All human balloons," said Pitt, "are cowards. And all cowards are liars. And they lie for a reason, although sometimes the reason isn't a very good one. You didn't know this stranger?"

"Never saw him in my life."

"Did anyone else in town know him?"

"Not so far as is known."

"Is there anything at all known about him?"

"Almost nothing. He was registered at the hotel as Bill Stark. He had a handbag, but there was nothing in it except some clothes. There were no papers on his person. The suit he

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was wearing was made in Detroit. That's all."

"Did he say anything to anyone about his purpose here in Slocan?" he asked.

"He asked the hotel clerk where Craven's Bluff was, and said he was to meet someone there."

Pitt smiled at the two benignly. "This thing gets more interesting as we go along. Has anyone claimed the body?"

"No one."

"And the falling over the cliff was an obvious accident?"

"Absolutely."

"No chance that Mr. Wiffing had anything to do with it?"

"None at all."

Pitt touched a match to a cigarette. "This Mr. Wiffing," he prompted, "is quite wealthy?"

"Lousy with money," exploded Tom. "It's really his wife's money, but he handles it."

"Ah!" said Pitt. "And what kind of a lady is Mrs. Wiffing?"

"Why, she's a regular wildcat—he's scared to death of her."

Pitt seemed very thoughtful. In a moment he brought out a sheaf of currency, thumbed through it. There were six hundred and thirty dollars. He flipped off five hundred, put it on the table.

"What—what's that for?" gasped the girl.

"Tomorrow morning," said Pitt, "you'll probably go through five very unhappy minutes. I'm paying for them now—at the rate of a hundred a minute."

"But that's crazy!" objected Tom. "You don't owe—"

"It's pleasant," observed Pitt, "to be crazy. Anyhow, I told Bess I had five hundred for her. Meanwhile, keep yourselves well concealed until you see me again."

He was moving toward the door. The two watched him in gaping silence as he went out. He rejoined Dan in the limousine.

"Find out anything, boss?" enquired Dan uneasily.

"Plenty," said Pitt, and related what had happened.

"Geez, boss," pleaded Dan, "there was no sense in giving them that dough. That leaves you only—"

"They're poor, and need it, Dan."

"Yeah. But *we* sure need plenty. We might get in a bad jam any time, especially with you fooling around a murder set-up like this. What's the answer, anyway?"

"The key to the situation, Dan, is that Mr. Wiffing is a human balloon."

"I don't get you," grumbled Dan.

"Well, I won't bother you with the complete process of reasoning. The point is that human balloons do queer things when they get badly scared. In this case, we have Mr. Wiffing deliberately accusing Tom of killing a man, for no apparent reason. Yet there is a reason, and I think it is fairly obvious."

"Yeah? But I don't see—"

"This stranger, Bill Stark, tells the clerk that he is to meet someone out on Craven's Bluff. The stranger goes out there. He dies by accident. There are only two present—Tom, and Mr. Wiffing.

"Very well. Later, in town, the hotel clerk tells of the stranger's engagement with someone on the bluff. Obviously, it was with either Tom or Mr. Wiffing. My theory is that Bill Stark was there to meet Mr. Wiffing. And Mr. Wiffing tried to cover up the fact that he knew Stark by accusing Tom. It is just the sort of hysterical thing a human balloon would do."

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"So what" growled Dan.

"So," said Pitt, serenely, "we shall now attend to Mr. Wiffing."

"I don't see what good that will do—"

"The case against Tom," Pitt pointed out, "has one weak spot. I shall help Mr. Wiffing to strengthen it."

Dan gazed at him, bewildered. "But I thought you was gonna help the young punk, not the Wiffing guy. And anyhow you can't make nothing out of it. You ain't got much more than a hundred bucks left—"

"We'll go to the hotel now, Dan," Pitt cut in briskly." "There's only one good one, according to what I heard in the pool room."

II

DAN started the car toward the business section, but his worry semed to increase.

"What do we want," he complained, "with a hotel? We ain't gonna stay—"

"We'll register," Pitt went on, "as coming from Detroit. It's unlikely that they get visitors from Detroit in this section, so we'll get plenty of attention, since Bill Stark came from there."

Dan looked startled. "Attention! But, cripes, boss, we don't want no attention. And maybe the cops will get interested."

"Quite possible," agreed Pitt. "But the more attention we get, the easeir it will be to convince Mr. Wiffing that I knew Bill Stark. News travels fast in these places."

In a few minutes they had taken a two-room suite at the hotel.

"Pleasant view from here," observed Pitt, gazing out of the window. "I can see the city hall from here—and that includes the police station."

Dan moaned. "I don't wanna see it. I don't wanna go anywhere near it. I—"

"But it's part of the plan," Pitt said, smiling.

"What—"

"In a little while," Pitt explained, "we're going out. And while I'm busy elsewhere, you're going to sit in the car just outside the police station—merely for effect, Dan. But first I must write an anoymous letter to Mr. Wiffing."

Shrugging hopelessly, Dan played a losing game of solitaire. Pitt busied himself at the writing table. In about an hour, Pitt was ready. They left the hotel, drove around to the police station, parked in front.

"Just sit there," Pitt jibed Dan affably, "as if you liked police stations."

Dan muttered a curse, but sat up straight. Pitt strolled away down the street. At the next corner he slipped an envelope, marked SPECIAL DELIVERY, into a mail box, and proceeded. Soon he stopped in front of a building on the main business street, turned into the entrance.

On the second floor he found a door with the simple inscription: AUGUST T. WIFFING.

Pitt opened the door and walked in. A girl at a desk looked up at him. Pitt smiled at her.

"Will you please tell Mr. Wiffing that Mr. Pitt wishes to see him—Mr. Pitt, of Detroit."

The girl murmured politely and went to the door of the adjoining room. Presently she came back, held the door open. Pitt walked past her.

A LARGE man was sitting behind an immense desk. He had a broad heavy face, with faintly cruel lines about his mouth, and large blue eyes which stared.

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"Sit down, sir," he said in a flat, hard voice.

Pitt sat down. "Thank you," he said. "I'll come to the point at once, Mr. Wiffing. I was interested in your local murder case—the murder of Bill Stark."

Mr. Wiffing's heavy eyelids slid up a little. "Really? But I know so little about it—"

"Of course," Pitt conceded pleasantly. "By the way, Mr. Wiffing, were you ever in Detroit?"

"Never, sir," Mr. Wiffing said emphatically.

"But surely you take business trips—"

"Only to Chicago, sir. Only to Chicago."

"And when did you make the last trip to Chicago?"

"Several weeks ago. But—"

"You were gone about a month?" Pitt prompted.

"Not at all. Not over two weeks," asserted Mr. Wiffing. "But you haven't come to the point, sir. What is the purpose of all this?"

Pitt smiled a little sadly. "As a relative of the late Bill Stark—"

"A relative!" exclaimed Mr. Wiffing.

"Only a cousin," Pitt told him. "But when I heard of Bill's death, I thought it only proper to come here to investigate." Pitt gazed placidly at Mr. Wiffing. "I'm told you saw him killed."

"That is correct, sir," Mr. Wiffing said stiffly.

"Well, that clinches the case against Tom Snow—almost."

"Almost?" queried Mr. Wiffing.

Pitt sighed lightly. "There's one weak point, Mr. Wiffing, the matter of motive."

"Motive?"

"True. You see, it is difficult to see *why* Tom Snow should have thrown Bill over the bluff."

Mr. Wiffing stared at him silently for some time. "I know nothing of that," he stated. "But I understand that Tom Snow was in Detroit not long ago. He may have met—"

"Possibly. But there's nothing to show that there was any connection between the two. Now, I'm in the mood to continue the investigation with a view to establishing the truth. And Tom Snow's escape complicates matters." Pitt got up and strolled to the window. "Of course, if Tom Snow were apprehended, and if he were also shown to have had a motive for the murder, that would settle it—I'd have no further interest in the matter."

"I can understand that," Mr. Wiffing said abruptly. "But I—well, I fail to see where I fit in."

Pitt walked back to the desk, smiled down at him blandly. "I'm sorry. I though you might he able to suggest something. Well, I'll return to the police station—"

"You're working with the police?" said Mr. Wiffing.

"After a fashion," Pitt evaded. "Thank you, sir. And—good day to you."

PITT strode out, Mr. Wiffing watching him curiously, walked quickly to the police station. "Well?" Dan said anxiously.

"Mr. Wiffing," Pitt said, "is what I thought—a human balloon. That will help, if anything does. Have you ever noticed how a toy balloon behaves—flitting this way and that according to how the wind is blowing? Well, that is exactly what Mr. Wiffing is doing now. So we must supply the right breezes. He—"

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"You're way ahead of me," complained Dan. "Where does this Wiffing guy fit in, anyway?"

"Surely," said Pitt, "that was obvious from the beginning. Bill Stark came here to see someone. He was killed. No one claimed the body. That means that not only was he a crook, but also that he was here on crooked business."

"What business?"

"What could it be but blackmail?" countered Pitt.

"Blackmail?"

"It has all the earmarks, Dan. Now, take Mr. Wiffing—a man of wealth whose wealth comes through his wife. And a wife who is known to be a wildcat. Exposure, of course, would be ruinous to anyone in Mr. Wiffing's circumstances. True, he claims he was never in Detroit—but he goes to Chicago on a trip that lasts two weeks. And he could easily commute between Chicago and Detroit unknown to anyone here. Doubtless there was a woman in Detroit—"

"But can you prove that?"

"No time for that, Dan. And we don't care about it. Our business concerns young Tom Snow.

"Tom's a nice chap, and Bess is a fine person."

Dan shook his head. "I don't see what you can do for the young punk—"

"We might," said Pitt, "be compelled to turn him over to the police!"

"A swell way to help him?" said Dan sarcastically.

"Meanwhile," said Pitt, "we'll return to the hotel."

But Pitt did not stay in his room. He was gone about an hour.

"Dan," he said, "I've just had a very interesting interview—with a minister."

"A—a parson!" gurgled Dan. "But what the—"

"The Reverend Oscar Duffle," Pitt went on. "An excellent gentleman. I had the pleasure of handing him a hundred dollars for his church charities."

Dan's eyes popped. "A hundred bucks! But, geez, boss, by the time you pay the hotel we'll be busted—"

"Of course," Pitt said, "The Reverend Duffle has agreed to perform a slight, yet unusual service, for me. I chose him because his word will never be doubted. I have another appointment with him at midnight."

III

IN the morning, arising late, Pitt ordered breakfast sent up to their rooms, with a copy of the morning paper. Pitt seemed to enjoy the paper even more than his coffee.

"I see," he observed, "that our balloon is susceptible to breezes. Well, we'll be leaving within an hour."

"Swell!" said Dan.

"That is," added Pitt, "if it's all right with the police chief."

Dan stared at him. "What the hell has the copper got to do with it?"

"We're calling on him right away," Pitt said. "It's nearly eleven o'clock, and the bank has been open since ten. Load the baggage into the limousine, Dan."

In a few minutes they had checked out and were sitting in the limousine.

"To the police station, Dan," Pitt said. "I think we'll be just in time."

Silently, Dan drove to the police station. Pitt stepped out, walked directly into the neat brick building.

A sign in the hall pointed the way to the office of the police chief on the second floor. Pitt made his way up the stairs. At the top of the stairs a large

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form loomed impressively in front of him.

Mr. Wiffing, apparently, had just come from the office of the police chief. He stopped abruptly as he saw Pitt.

"Ah! Good morning, Mr. Wiffing," Pitt said affably.

Mr. Wiffing muttered a good morning and started past.

"By the way, Mr. Wiffing," Pitt went on, "I'm just going to see the chief. I think you'll be interested. Won't you join me?"

Mr. Wiffing hesitated. "All right, all right," he snapped.

Together they turned into a doorway. The police chief, a bluff hearty man, a little dull of eye, looked up at them.

Pitt introduced himself quickly. "I'm here in the same connection," he explained, "as Mr. Wiffing—the Stark case."

The chief cleared his throat. "Okay. But what—"

"I," said Pitt, promptly, "know the whereabouts of Tom Snow!"

There was a queer silence for a little while. Mr. Wiffing stared at Pitt as if he wanted to say something yet didn't quite dare.

The chief got to his feet. "Well!" he boomed. "That'll clean things up nicely. Only this morning, acting on a tip, we searched Tom's rooms again and found some papers belonging to the murdered man. No question now that Tom and the dead man was mixed up together some way! So you know—"

"I do," said Pitt. His face was set in unusual gravity. "And I'll take you there now." He paused a moment. "I suggest, sir, that you take with you whatever Mr. Wiffing brought here."

The chief reached into a desk, found a large envelope, inserted it into his pocket. In a few moments they emerged from the building. Pitt got in the limousine beside Dan. Mr. Wiffing went with the chief, in the chief's car.

"To the young lady's house, Dan," instructed Pitt.

Dan's face was a study. But he started the car. The chief's car chugged along behind them.

"Geez," muttered Dan, "I don't get it. You—you're turning the young guy in, huh?"

"There's no other way, Dan."

Dan glanced furtively into the mirror, watched the car behind. "I hate like hell to have a copper's car tail me. He—"

"There's the house, Dan," Pitt cut in.

DAN stopped against the curb. The chief clattered to a stop behind him. When Pitt stepped out of the limousine, the chief joined him hurriedly, followed by Mr. Wiffing. The chief gazed blankly at the little white house.

"Well, I'll be danged!" breathed the chief. He turned to Pitt. "You mean Tom's been hiding out here in Bess's house?"

Pitt nodded briefly. He led the way up the walk to the door. The chief knocked. There was no answer. He knocked again. There was still no response. Then he yelled: "Hi, Bess!"

A face appeared at the side window. The girl looked bewildered, worried, hurt. She shook her head, as if she wanted them to go away.

But suddenly the door bolt was being drawn. The door opened. Young Tom Snow himself stood there. The girl appeared, rushed toward Tom, clung to his arm.

"Come in, gentlemen," Tom said

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calmly. "No use my trying to dodge you any longer." He was looking queerly at Pitt.

They entered the house. The girl's face was buried against Tom's chest. Abruptly, she turned and looked at Pitt. "So you betrayed us!" she said with quiet bitterness.

Pitt's face was expressionless.

"Sorry, Bess," the chief said firmly. "Tom will have to come along."

"I'm ready," said Tom.

Pitt stepped forward. "I'll appreciate," he said smoothly, "a private word with Mr. Wiffing."

"Why, sure," said the chief. "Sure."

Mr. Wiffing stood swaying a little, as if he were not sure what it was all about. But he followed Pitt into the adjoining room.

Pitt faced him, spoke to him softly: "Sit down."

Mr. Wiffing sat at a table. Pitt sat opposite him. Pitt was smiling blandly now.

"Mr. Wiffing," said Pitt, "I merely want you to write a statement, and sign it."

"A statement?" queried Mr. Wiffing.

"Yes. A statement setting forth that you did not see Tom Snow throw Bill Stark over the bluff—that it was really an accident!"

MR. Wiffing started to get up, then sat down again, as if his legs couldn't quite sustain him. "But this—this is absurd! I—"

"Of course," Pitt cut in genially, "I don't want the statement for nothing. In fact, I'll give you another statement in exchange."

"But I—I don't want any—"

"If you don't want it, I'll just give it to the chief," Pitt announced. "Here is the statement."

He unfolded a paper and read aloud: "This is to certify that I saw Mr. August Wiffing enter the house of Tom Snow by a back window at eleven ten this evening and emerge in the same fashion a few minutes later. I might add that Mr. Wiffing appeared anxious to escape observation.

(signed) Rev. Oscar Duffle."

"You see," Pitt continued, "I an-

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ticipated that you might try to plant something in Tom's house—that being the only place you could plant anything—to conect Tom with Bill Stark, since I was sure that you didn't want me to carry the investigation further. It was fairly obvious that when you climbed down the bluff to Bill Stark's body, having sent Tom for help, you removed all papers from his person. And it was quite likely that you still had some of them. The Reverend Duffle, of course, was watching Tom's house last night."

Mr. Wiffing's large blue eyes had gone a little wild. He was making little gasping sounds. "All right," he mumbled.

He scrawled with nervous rapidity on the back of an envelope. Pitt picked it up, read it, nodded approvingly, put the statement in a plain envelope and sealed it.

Mr. Wiffing got up unsteadily, reached for the paper in Pitt's hand.

"But one thing more," said Pitt. "Just write me an authorization for the chief with respect to the item in this morning's paper—the reward, you know."

Mr. Wiffing found another slip of paper, scrawled on it, handed it to Pitt.

"There's a side door here," Pitt pointed out. "You don't want to see the chief just now. I'll just tell him you hurried home—to your wife."

Mr. Wiffing, apparently, was obeying suggestions without resistance.

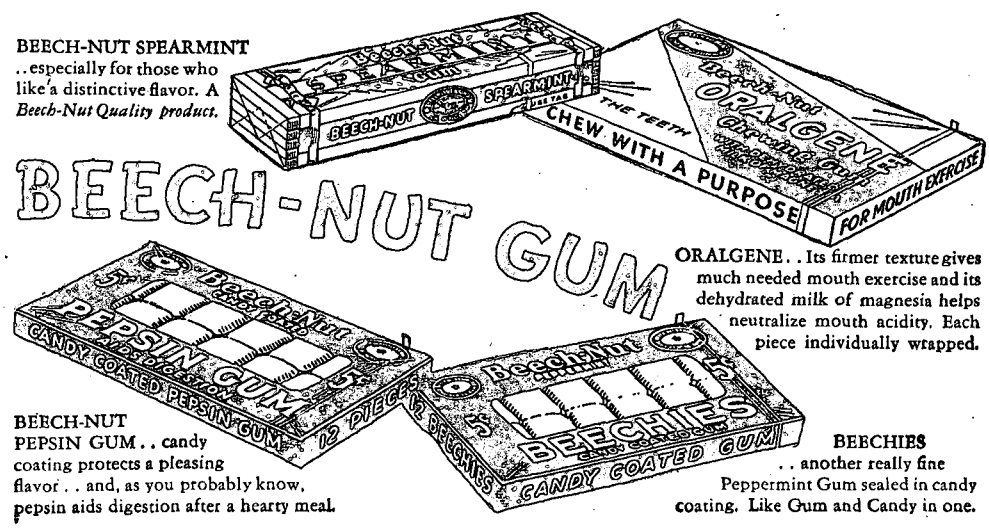
In a moment he was moving uncertainly through the door and along a side walk.

Pitt returned to the room where the others were waiting.

He handed the sealed envelope to the chief. "Mr. Wiffing had to go home to his wife. But he requested you to open this and read it—in five minutes!"

The chief looked a little dazed. But Mr. Wiffing's word was law so far as he was concerned. "Why, sure," he said. "Okay. Anything Mr. Wiffing says—"

"THERE was an item in this morning's paper," Pitt proceeded quickly, "to the effect that Mr. Wiffing was offering two thousand dollars reward to anyone revealing the whereabouts of Tom Snow.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Here is his written order to turn the money over to me!"

The chief read it. "Well, I guess that's right." He brought the large envelope out of his pocket and handed it to Pitt. "Guess you're entitled—"

"To be sure," said Pitt. He looked intently at Tom Snow and Bess Tolly. "I wish you two much happiness."

Tom merely stared at him grimly.

Bess snapped out, "Best wishes from a traitor!"

Pitt bowed, hurried out to the limousine, got in with Dan.

"Hurry, Dan," he said.

Dan needed no urging. In a moment they were headed for the highway.

Dan looked at him. "Geez, boss, you don't look so good. "What's worrying you—"

"Five minutes," said Pitt. "Five minutes."

"Yeah. But what—"

"I had to get away with the reward, Dan, before the chief knew that his prisoner isn't really a prisoner. There might have been some question about its payment. So I gave myself five minutes' start."

"What reward you talking about?" said Dan.

"I wrote an anonymous letter to Mr. Wiffing, offering to turn in Tom Snow if he, Mr. Wiffing, published an offer of a reward in the morning paper. I knew he would fall for it, and told him just how to handle it."

They were out on the highway making speed.

Pitt looked at his watch, smiled suddenly. "The five minutes are up!"

Dan looked amazed. "Sure, but why feel so good about it?"

"For five minutes," Pitt said, "those two young people have thought of me as the lowest form of human. There is only one thing more unpleasant than to have some one think of you in that way—and that is to have to think that way about others. I paid them a hundred a minute for it—but it wasn't enough."

THE COUNTERFEIT BILL SWITCH

STOREKEEPERS are usually the victims of this switch. A customer comes in, makes a few purchases and tenders a ten-dollar bill. Soon after he has left a man who could easily be taken for a detective enters.

"Have you changed a ten-dollar bill for a short man, with a black mustache, wearing rimless glasses?"

"Why, yes. He just left here not five minutes ago," replies the storekeeper.

The man who looks like a detective says that he is from police headquarters. The police have been looking for Mr. Savolli who is a notorious counterfeiter. He would very much like to see the ten-dollar bill.

The storekeeper shows the bogus detective the bill. He examines it very carefully, turning his back while he does so. During this interval he has switched the ten-dollar bill which is not counterfeit at all to a counterfeit which he carries with him.

"Just as I thought. It is a counterfeit. Put it aside. I shall be back."

Of course, he never comes back. Fifteen minutes later he is pulling the same stunt a few blocks down the street. The man who enters the store just ahead of him is an accomplice. —*Edward Podolsky.*

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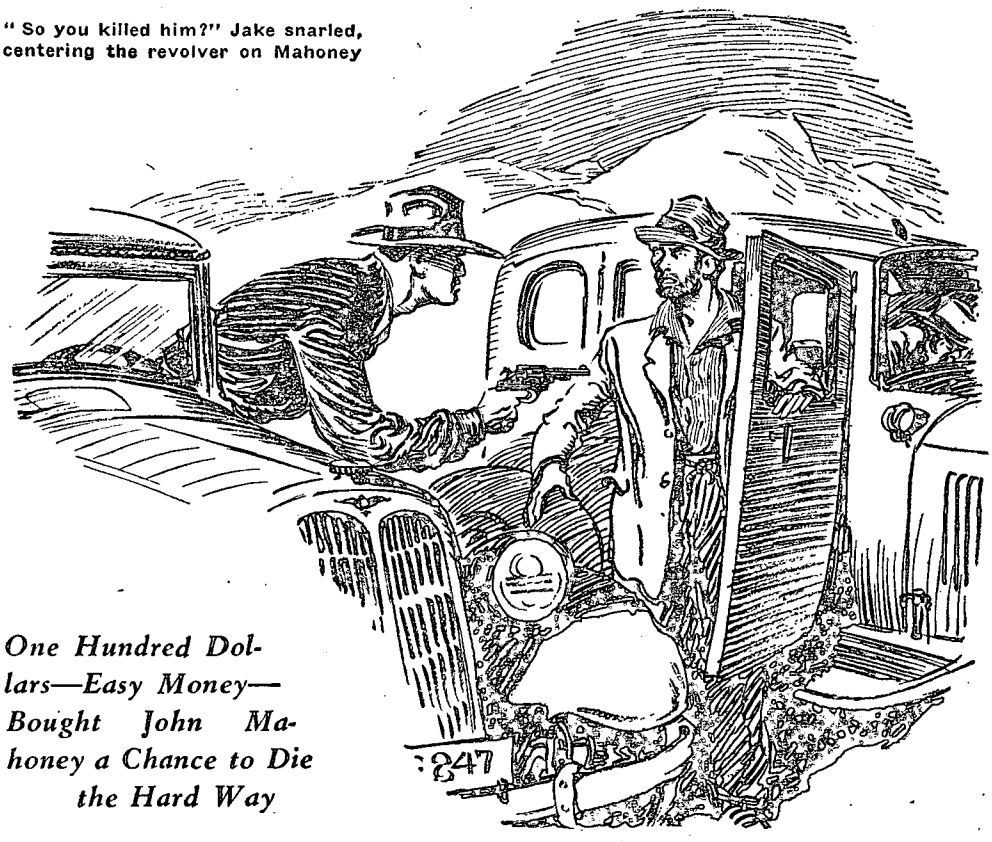
"So you killed him?" Jake snarled, centering the revolver on Mahoney



One Hundred Dollars—Easy Money—Bought John Mahoney a Chance to Die the Hard Way

Killer's Brand

By Wyatt Blassingame

JOHN MAHONEY'S blue eyes pulled into a worried squint. "There's something wrong about that fellow," he thought, watching the man wander off toward the west end of the freight yards. He was dressed like a hobo all right, but he didn't look like one. There was a dark, criminal twist to his mouth and his eyes were like those of a snake. And no man on the bum should be able to lose a hundred dollars in a crap game and not seem worried about it. John Mahoney, starting with two dollars and nineteen cents, had just won the hundred bucks.

D F W ACTION SHORT

"Hell, I don't have to worry about how he got it," Mahoney thought, pushing big, freckled hands through his red hair. He jumped down from the box car and went slowly toward the weather-beaten switch-house

The crap game had taken place at a freight junction, and though Mahoney knew there was a small town about fif-

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teen miles away, he wasn't certain of the direction. In this lonely desert country it would probably be a hundred miles to the next city on the freight and he didn't intend to ride box cars that distance when he could walk a few miles and get clean clothes, a bath, and a passenger train. A hundred dollars would take him to El Paso and give him a week or more of luxury—unless he lost it in a crap game or met a girl with too expressive tastes.

But for some reason he had an odd premonition that trouble was going to break—worse trouble than he had seen in all the hectic twenty-six years of his life.

Two men were standing in front of the switchhouse. One of them was dark and lean and sour-faced. The other was short, heavily built, with sandy hair. He looked like the kind of a brakeman who would wait until the train was miles from water and then kick the hoboes off.

Mahoney asked, "How do I get over to Summerville?"

"What you want to go there for?" the squat man said. "Why don't you catch a freight and get out of here?" It was an order, not a question.

"I think I'll give up riding freights for a while," Mahoney said flatly. "Do you mind telling me the way to Summerville?"

"A tough guy, huh?" the squat man said. "Well . . ."

The lean, dark fellow said, "Aw, leave him alone, Jake." He pointed toward a road that was little more than a path through hot sand. "That's the way. And here's a cup of coffee." He flipped Mahoney a dime.

Mahoney hesitated, the coin in his hand. He started to tell the man that he had a hundred dollars—but for some reason he kept quiet. He couldn't get over the feeling of danger this money gave him.

Finally he said, "Thanks," put the dime in his pocket, turned, and started up the road. Even then he wasn't certain why he had kept it. He had won money in crap games before. Why did this give him such a leery feeling? He shrugged. He'd take whatever happened as he always had, good luck and bad.

The sun did not climb the sky but seemed to pull straight across. When he had covered five miles, it felt close enough to touch and he was putting his feet on the head of his shadow each time he stepped. He was wishing he'd stuck to the freights, when he heard the sound of the car chugging along behind him. A minute later it had stopped.

An old man with a big grin on his face and a wad of tobacco in his left jaw peered out. "Sort of hot walkin', ain't it?"

"You can fry eggs on the soles of my feet," Mahoney said.

"Well, get in, get in," the old man said, and spat a brown, bullet-like stream. "Let's get goin'." He pushed open the door.

"Thanks," Mahoney said. "This is certainly my lucky day."

"Lucky, heh?" The old man chuckled as the car gound into gear. "Not many would say that, walkin' through this country. I make this drive every week and it ain't often I get to pick up anybody. But I like company when I can. Carry quite a bit of money sometimes and folks allus tell me not to pick up strangers. But I ain't had no trouble yet."

"It's very nice of you," Mahoney said. "Out there is—" He saw that the old man was not listening to him, but leaning forward and working with

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the choke. The car sputtered a few times and stopped. "Sounds like it's out of gas," the old man said.

Mahoney got out and looked into the tank. The bottom glistened back at him. "Empty," he said.

"That's danged strange. I would have swore I had plenty. Now . . ." He rolled the tobacco slowly from cheek to cheek.

"Where's the first filling station?"

"Ain't no station on this road. Nobody travels here but folks from the junction." He rolled his tobacco again, and spat. "It ain't more'n half a mile, a mile maybe, to the Jenkins place. You can get a can of gas there, if you'll walk it for me. Tell 'em Fred Hunter asked you to get it."

"Sure," Mahoney said. "It won't take me long."

HE plunged into the white glare of the sunshine, and forty-five minutes later he was back, the can of gasoline in his hand. His eyes ached from the sunlight so that he could scarcely see the old man sitting in the car. "Here's the gas," Mahoney said.

The old man didn't answer and Mahoney walked to the rear of the car, poured in the gas, and came back. He put the can in the rear seat, said, "We can get started now," and moved to take the seat beside the driver.

It was then he saw the pistol. He stared at it for what seemed an hour. Then his eyes moved slowly and he saw the rest of the seat, the old man's thighs, waist, and the dull stain which had spread downward over his stomach. And finally he saw the bullet hole right above the right breast, the powder burn around it.

Mahoney said huskily, "Mr. Hunter! Mr. Hunter!" His right hand came up and reached for the old man's shoulder, then fell away without touching him. He picked up the gun, staring at it with wide, half-glazed eyes.

"The old man's dead," he thought dully. He had never seen murder before and it stunned him. The old fellow had been such a kindly, likable person. Now he was dead, murdered! And the murderer had sat right there beside him, *right where Mahoney had been sitting less than an hour ago!*

Mahoney put the gun back on the seat. For a full minute he stood with one foot still on the running board, unmoving. He had been in tight scrapes before, but he'd never had dealings with the police except on minor gambling or vagrancy charges. Now he wasn't certain what to do. He had some idea that a person wasn't supposed to touch a body before the police saw it. "I'll have to leave him here," he thought, "and walk back to the Jenkins place and—"

He heard the sound of the automobile. By the time he had his foot off the running board and turned, the car had pulled up. The squat, cruel-faced man called Jake was driving. Beside him sat a mild-eyed, elderly fellow.

"Hey there!" Jake said. "What's the. . . ?" He stopped suddenly, his mouth still open. His hand flashed downward and back. He was out of the car, holding a big revolver with the muzzle centered on Mahoney. "Curse you!" he snarled. "So you killed him?"

"Huh?" Mahoney said. "I didn't! I went—" He didn't finish, for the whole picture had exploded full-grown on his brain. Hunter had said he was carrying money. That money would be gone now. The gun beside the body had Mahoney's prints on it and probably those of no one else. There was the hundred dollars in Mahoney's

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pocket—and who would believe the story that he had won it in a crap game from a hobo? Hoboes—ordinary ones—didn't have a fiftieth of that to lose.

"I oughta kill you now," Jake said. "I oughta blow you apart like you did old man Hunter."

"But I didn't kill him," Mahoney said desperately. "I didn't! We gave out of gas and I walked up the road to get some. When I got back he was—was like this. I haven't touched him."

"Yeah?" Jake said. "Who in the hell'll believe that? But we got you before you did away with the money." Without taking his eyes from Mahoney he said, "Go over to the car, Tom, and get the money out. I reckon we better leave Mr. Hunter here till we get this fellow to the police in Summerville."

The mild-eyed man got out of the automobile timidly. He tried to keep from looking at Hunter's body while he searched the other car. "There ain't any money," he said. "He must of hid it."

"Where is it?" Jake's big hand was white from its pressure on the gun.

Mahoney said, "I don't know. I told you the truth. I didn't kill him. You think I'd of stayed here to be caught?"

"You didn't mean to," Jake said. "But you did. And I reckon the money ain't important now. Police'll find it." He jerked his left thumb toward his car. "Get in."

The ride into town seemed to John Mahoney to be only a matter of seconds. He sat on the back seat while Tom drove and Jake kept him covered with the gun. His brain turned dully, beating at all the walls that closed in around him, finding no way out. Once he thought of kicking at Jake's gun and making a break. But if he escaped he'd be caught before he covered a hundred miles. In this desert country you couldn't leave the roads and if you stayed on them there was no chance.

II

ONCE he was in jail what hope was there? All the evidence pointed to his guilt and he couldn't even prove who he was. He had never recognized any debt to society; he had never done anything criminal, but neither had he ever done or tried to do anything worth while. He had no family. There was not a person in the world who could say a good word for his character. He had never done anything for society and society would do nothing now to save him. They'd tie the murder to him without trying to learn anything else. He'd be hanged, buried in Potter's Field—and forgotten.

"I oughta kill you now," Jake kept saying. "Shootin' a old man like Mr. Hunter in cold blood."

"But I didn't kill him," John Mahoney insisted. "I didn't kill him." That was all there was to say.

Then they were in the jail where a walrus-mustached sheriff with a ten-gallon hat that he wore indoors as well as out searched Mahoney and found the money. The sheriff counted it carefully on the table. "Umn," he said. "A hundred and two dollars and twenty-nine cents. How much was old man Hunter bringing, Jake?"

"Don't know exactly," Jake said. "Wing'll know. It was around a thousand dollars."

The sheriff looked at Mahoney and his small blue eyes were filled with loathing. "Where'd you put the rest of it?" he said flatly.

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Mahoney spoke for the first time after entering the jail. "I didn't kill him. I went to get gas and came back and he was dead. That's all I know."

"Where'd you get this money?"

"I won it in a crap game. From a hobo at the junction." Mahoney described him, added. "He was going to take the freight west."

The sheriff's eyes hardened. His mouth under the mustache became a straight line. "That sounds mighty fishy. But I'll find out. Folks 'round here thought a lot of old man Hunter. It ain't going easy with you if we prove you killed him."

"Prove, hell!" Jake said. "I practically saw him do it."

"We'll make sure," the sheriff said. He locked Mahoney into a cell. It was a small country jail with one room in front and in the rear a narrow hall with three tiny cells on each side. When the men went out of the front door Mahoney was in the place alone.

For a long while he sat hunched over on the bunk, his head in his hands. He was half stunned by what had happened, his mind groping desperately for some loophole in the solid wall of circumstances that closed around him. Even if the sheriff wired to the next town to the west and caught the hobo from whom he won the money, would that help? They would simply believe that Mahoney had hidden all the money he had taken from Hunter. The gun with his prints on it would cinch the case.

"I've got to get out of here," he thought. "I've got to find who really killed him because the sheriff is going to think I did and quit looking." But how could he find the murderer? How could he stay hidden from the sheriff, even if he could escape? And a five-minute tour of his narrow cell showed him that he couldn't escape. The jail was small, but the bars were set in concrete and steady. The only way out would be through the door and that would be impossible without the key.

"What will it matter if they do hang me?" he thought dully. "I've done nothing to make persons care whether I'm alive or dead. Just be one less hobo on the freights."

It was late in the afternoon that, looking out of the window he saw the dark, sour-faced man called Wing, the one who had given him the dime. He was standing beside a roadster, talking to a girl who sat back of the wheel.

With his first glimpse of the girl Mahoney forgot Wing. He pulled himself closer to the bars and stared at her. She was beautiful, small, with honey-colored hair and very level eyes and a full mouth. There was something oddly familiar about her face, though he was certain he had never seen her before.

But even as he watched an expression of horror came into her eyes. Her mouth opened in a short cry that choked. Then her whole face set with agony.

Mahoney looked at Wing. He stood beside the roadster as though he wanted to sink under it and couldn't. He was speaking, and though Mahoney could not hear the words, he saw the hesitant movement of his mouth, the weak gestures. The girl sat rigid, holding onto the wheel, her face a terrible white.

AND then, suddenly, Mahoney knew who she was. She was the daughter of old man Hunter and Wing was telling her of her father's death! There was no mistaking the line of her chin, the mouth that could have smiled so easily, but

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now was pulled straight with pain. . . .

Wing glanced up, saw Mahoney and said something to the girl. She turned slowly to look at him and for a moment they gazed full into one another's eyes. Mahoney's hands were bloodless around the bars of the window, his face pushed close against them. His gaze clung to that of the girl and he seemed to hurl his thoughts at her with a physical effort. She couldn't look at him and think he was guilty! She couldn't! "She's *got* to see I'm innocent!" Mahoney thought.

The girl put both hands over her face and sank face down upon the seat, but not before Mahoney had seen the look of hatred and agony in her eyes. Wing got into the car, moving the girl gently. Then he drove away.

Mahoney let go the bars of the window. His big frame seemed to slump in upon itself as he crumpled to the bunk. *That* girl thinking he had killed her father. Of course she did. Everyone would think that. And the real murderer would go free.

"I'm going to get out of here," Mahoney said aloud. "I'm going to find the man that did it. I don't know how, but I'm going to find him." He stood up then, straight and stiffly erect, blue eyes blazing for the first time since he had found the body of Hunter. His red hair was like a flame above his set face. With slow, calm fury he attacked the room, tugging at every bar with all his strength, battering himself against them. But after a half hour he knew that it was hopeless.

It was early dark when the sheriff came back into the jail, Wing and Jake with him. They stopped just outside the door of the cell. "That's him," Wing said. "The same one Jake and I saw. I gave him a dime."

"How come you took that money if you had a hundred dollars?" the sheriff asked. "You wouldn't need another dime."

Mahoney knew there was no need of arguing. He couldn't explain the premonition of danger which had kept him silent about the money he'd won. There was no chance to convince those men of his innocence. His only hope was to escape and settle this thing himself.

"I was afraid to tell them," he said flatly. "Did you try to find the man I gambled with?"

"We tried," the sheriff said. "Nobody like that on the train going west 'cause I wired and found out, had the freight stopped.

"Maybe he didn't go west," Mahoney said.

"No train east until eight tonight," Wing said, rubbing at a brown spot on his coat sleeve. "Have to be in the yards if he didn't go west. We searched the yards."

Mahoney was suddenly tense, his muscles drawn hard, his blue eyes narrowed. That hobo might be more important than he had thought. Proving that he had won the money gambling would not keep them from hanging him for the murder of old man Hunter, but suppose. . . .

Jake said, "We oughta try this guy quick and get it over with, Sheriff. Ain't no need of keepin' him around feedin' him. We *oughta* lynch him."

"Be no lynching while I'm sheriff." His pale blue eyes shifted to Mahoney. "Anything you wanta say you better say it now. Pleading guilty ain't sure to help you, but you can do it if you want."

Mahoney's muscles were rock-hard, arms bent slightly at the elbows, weight resting on the balls of his feet. If he

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were going to escape, if he were going to have a chance to save his life, he had to get free now. He fought to keep his voice steady. "There's something I'd like to show you, Sheriff, about that money. You'll have to take me to the front of the jail where the light's good."

The sheriff tugged at his mustache. "All right. But I ain't hesitating to shoot if you try anything." He pulled his gun with his right hand, held it ready while he fitted a key to the door with his left.

III

IT was coming now, his one chance. Mahoney's breath was caught high in his chest. Time seemed suspended then for an age long second during which he saw all the minute details of the scene before him: the veins in the back of the sheriff's hand, the restless shifting of Jake's boots, the brown spot on Wing's sleeve.

Then the lock clicked.

Mahoney drove into the door like a blocking halfback. It smashed open, hitting the sheriff, whirling him backward. The gun roared.

Jake cursed and flung himself at Mahoney while Wing jumped to block the passageway. Mahoney, half on his knees after striking the door, came upward with all his hundred and sixty pounds back of the blow. It made a cracking sound on Jake's jaw, then Mahoney was through the door, driving straight at Wing. On the floor the sheriff pawed for his gun.

Wing crouched and dived. Mahoney's stiff arm caught him on the nose and turned him over backward. Then he was slamming open the front door and driving out. Behind him a gun banged twice.

He cut left, circled the jail at full stride. A car was coming along the dusty street. Behind him voices were shouting and he knew that the sheriff would have circled the jail in five seconds. With a clear shot he wouldn't miss.

Mahoney raced straight at the automobile, jumped for the running board. The impact of the moving car nearly tore the muscles from his arms, but he held on. Somehow he got the door open and was inside, one hand under his shirt. "Keep going, fast!" he snapped, "or I'm shooting."

It was then that he saw the driver. Old man Hunter's daughter!

There were tears in her eyes that were open wide now with surprise and fear. Her mouth jerked as though she would scream, but there was no sound. Slowly her lips steadied, the fear went out of her face. "Murderer!" she said. Deliberately she put her foot on the brake. Not fifty yards behind Mahoney could hear the sheriff shouting.

There was only one thing to do. He doubled his fist and swung it against the girl's jaw. She went limp and he wondered, half-sick, if he had struck too hard.

The car was slowing down. Frantically he pulled the girl to one side, crawled over her to the steering wheel. The motor roared as he stepped hard on the accelerator. His right hand switched off the lights.

A half-mile out of town, he swung off the main road onto the small one he had traveled that morning. There would be cars after them within a minute or two, but it wasn't likely they'd come this way. Probably they'd keep on the highway thinking he would race for the next town.

The girl stirred slightly, and made a moaning sound. Mahoney put his right arm around her and held her

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gently as he could against the seat. She would regain consciousness in a minute or two, and she wouldn't want him touching her then. He had struck her, knocked her unconscious. And she believed that he had killed her father.

He said through clenched teeth, "She wouldn't want me to touch her anyway. A hobo, a man who never held a job more than two weeks, never stayed in one town when he could get out of it."

The girl moaned again, put one hand to her chin. Her head swayed, and Mahoney, watching the road, could feel her tensing. She was conscious now, he thought, and took his arm away. In a moment she would recognize him and begin to scream.

But she didn't. He heard her breathing go suddenly heavy, then quiet. "What are you going to do with me? You—you killed my father. Now what are you going to do?"

Admiration for the girl flowed through him. She wasn't the hysterical type. He should have known that.

His gaze went back to the road. "Listen," he said slowly. "You won't believe me, but I want to tell you anyway. I didn't kill your father. I don't know who did, though I have an idea. But I didn't. I'm a hobo, shiftless, worthless. But I'm not a criminal. Your father was kind to me; I wouldn't have killed him. And I—I . . ." he coughed, "I didn't want to hit you. I just had to."

"Of course I believe you," she said bitterly. "And where are you taking me now?"

"I'm going back to where—where I left your father this morning. Maybe I can find some sign of what really happened."

"You expect me to believe that?"

"No," he said. "But it's true." He could feel her watching him, her eyes level and unafraid.

HE found the exact spot where the car had given out of gas that morning, stopped a few yards from it and switched on the lights. He cut off the motor, put the key in his pocket, and got out. Whoever had killed Hunter had come from across country or from the freight junction and had gone back that way. He searched the narrow, sandy road for more than a hundred yards in each direction, but could find no place where a car had turned around.

And then he found it, a thin brownish streak on the right side of the road. He stared at it for a full minute, knelt and touched it with his forefinger. His brain was racing now, seething with a furious, half-desperate hope. Suddenly he straightened and leaped back to the automobile. The girl sat there, very quietly, watching him.

"Do they have any horses or a motorcycle at the freight junction? Do you know?"

"They have several horses."

"What time is it?" His voice was hoarse with excitement now. "Quick!"

She looked at her watch. "Eight o'clock. What have you found?"

"Maybe nothing," he said. He dived into the car, putting the key in the ignition as he moved. The machine jerked when he let the clutch out and stamped on the gas.

"You're going to kill us," she said a minute later. "We'll turn over."

"I may get killed anyway," he said. "But you won't be hurt." He kept quiet a moment, then said, "I'm looking for a man at the freight junction. He'll leave on that eight o'clock train, but freights are usually late. I've got to talk to him, and you've got to listen

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while I do. It may mean everything —maybe nothing."

"Why should I listen?" Her voice was very quiet.

"If I'm right about this man, I can prove I didn't kill your father. If I fail—you know what'll happen to me. I'll be hanged. You're not the sort of girl who wouldn't give a man a chance to live."

Lights showed ahead. The car whirled into the freight yards and Mahoney slammed on the brakes. He could hear the slow rumble of wheels, see the black outline of the train thirty yards to his left. "We've missed it," he said dully. "The man'll be aboard."

The girl said, "We haven't missed it yet." She knocked open the door, was out of the car and running.

"Hey!" Mahoney shouted "Hey, you can't . . .!" Then he was running after her. She was crawling up the side of a gondola before he reached the train and caught the other end of the same car.

The train was gaining speed as he stood in the car, face to face with her. The iron floor bounced under their feet; the lights of the junction were moving backward and fading. Mahoney glanced at them, then down at the face of the girl, tilted back to look at him. He felt something curious and hard in his throat. It made talking difficult. He said, "You don't even know that I didn't kill your father. You're taking an awful chance just to save the life of a tramp."

She kept looking at him, steadily.

"I appreciate it," he said. His voice changed. "Follow me along the train. Be careful. Don't look like you're with me, but get close enough to hear what's said."

He found the man alone in a gondola about half way to the caboose. At first neither recognized the other, but as Mahoney came close their eyes met. It was the small, dark fellow from whom he had won the hundred dollars.

"I thought you were going west," Mahoney said.

The man was crouched against the wall of the car. "I changed my mind."

"I thought you would. And I caught the same train—to murder you!" He towered over the small man like a cat over a mouse, waiting.

"What you mean?" The man's face was suddenly pale in the darkness. "I done nothin' to you."

"Nothing but murder a man and frame me. But I proved I wasn't guilty and the sheriff got in behind that man Wing, the one that gave you the money to plant on me. Wing confessed his part and told them you killed Hunter."

The man's mouth jerked back into a snarl. He crouched, animal-like. His eyes glittered against Mahoney's. "That lowdown—" he stopped, said slowly, "If you got out of it, what are you here for?"

"I got out of that one, but they recognized me from pictures. They were going to send me back to L.A. on a robbery charge. I got away, but I haven't got any money. Now I'm going to take your share, and dump you between cars. Frame me, huh? Now . . ."

IV

THE man moved with the speed of dark lightning. His hand was under his coat, coming out. There was the glint of an automatic. Mahoney slapped at it, felt the barrel slide between his fingers. He swung his left fist as the gun roared. Fire streaked his side, but there was no impact from the bullet. Then he swung

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again, and the little man went down.

The man's head bobbed. He started mumbling before he was fully conscious, his voice getting louder until it was almost a scream. "You can't throw me over! I can't die that way. I can't!"

"You will," Mahoney said. He lifted the man as he would a child.

"But I didn't frame you," the man screamed. "I didn't know anybody was gonna get croaked. The fellow just paid me to put that money on a hobo and have him moving toward the town at nine o'clock. Then he hid me this afternoon when the sheriff was out. I didn't know it was murder! I didn't!"

"Okay," Mahoney said. He flung the little man to the floor of the gondola, picked up the gun. He turned to the girl who had slipped close, unnoticed. "You hear him?"

"Yes," she said, "but . . ."

"Whoever framed me had to be somebody who knew that your father would pick me up. All the men at the junction knew how kind he was, and they knew the hour he left. Whoever killed him had drained his gas so that it would give out. When I went for gas he came on a horse, killed your father, rode back without being seen. The murderer had hired this man to plant the money on me so I would be convicted and there'd be no real search. When the sheriff didn't find this fellow on the west-bound train, I knew he must have waited for this one. And when the sheriff didn't find him in the yards, somebody must have hidden him. It all added up to one of the men at the junction.

"But how did you know which one?" she asked.

"Your father marked him. There was tobacco juice on the right side of the road where the car was parked, but your father sat under the steering wheel. And there was tobacco juice on Wing's coat sleeve. Even after he was shot, your father branded him."

He paused, looking down at the girl. "I would have hanged if it hadn't been for you. I didn't think anybody would do what you did just to save a—"

"You don't have to be a tramp," she said. "You could hold a job if you wanted to."

"Is there one open around Summerville?"

"Yes. But can you stay in one town long enough to work?"

"I can stay in one town and work," he said, "as long as you're there."

"That will be a long time," she said softly.

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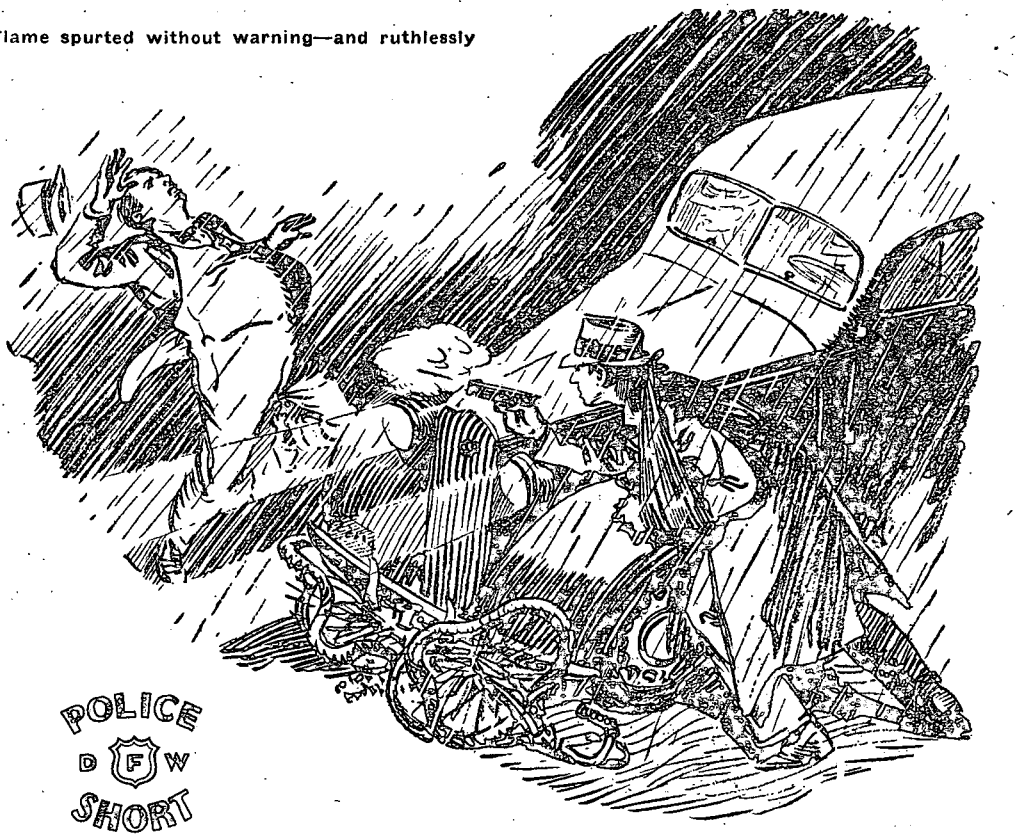
Flame spurted without warning—and ruthlessly



POLICE SHORT

Triple Alibi

By Dale Clark

IT was a wet, windy night. The green eye of the traffic signal at Boul' and Lexington corner blinked at the detectives' car. Hamill and Dohenty, first grade members of the Homicide detail, were off duty and homeward bound. Ed Ham[illegible] gripped the w[illegible] tight in his thick fingers, watched the Western Union kid on his bike start through the light ahead of the machine.

Rookie Detective Westerby Has to Take His Stand Against the Sinister Tests of Gangland to Reach the Slayer of Detective Dohenty

Suddenly another car rocketed down Lexington. Stop? Hell, no power on earth could halt the speeding juggernaut. Both Ed Hamill and Mike Dohenty knew that. But the kid on the Western Union bike failed to sense his danger. One arm stuck out, face ducked away from the wind driven rain, the boy was slowly wheeling into a left hand turn.

Ed Hamill barked, "Take him!"

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His blunt toe crashed onto the gas pedal. Tires ripped a harsh whine from the rain-slicked pavement. Ed Hamill's lips thinned into a straight, desperate line. And Dohenty's powerful shoulders bunched forward. They understood each other, these two. Eight years they had been paired together on the Force. The same thought flashed almost telepathically from brain to brain.

Hamill shot the car straight ahead, right across the path of the juggernaut. Dohenty leaned wide, drove a muscular arm through the open window.

The white blaze of the juggernaut lamps etched the scene as in a photo-flash. It threw pitiless glare on the kid's face—haggard, now, staring into the eyes of Death. It showed Ed Hamill's face in bleak, etched profile. Dohenty's outthrust hand collared the kid, and lifted him clean off the bicycle, dragged him bodily up onto the running board. Hamill's toe stayed frozen on the floorboard.

The juggernaut whanged into the bicycle. Brakes squalled. The detectives' car had slid through by an eyelash. Hamill's foot now went off the gas pedal, found the brake.

Mike Dohenty's head jerked around. The instant the car stopped, Dohenty leaped. Running heavily, he pounded back toward the corner. Ed Hamill knifed out from under the wheel. He slammed past the sobbing boy, raced after Dohenty.

The other car had careened up to the curb. In the burst of the headlamps, Ed Hamill saw a man frantically tearing the mangled bike out from under the front wheels. The fellow had one arm in a sling. But Hamill could not see his face. "Hey, you!" Dohenty thundered.

The fellow scuttled out of the light. Now Hamill could see faces pressed to wet glass of the car, but the faces were mere whitish blurs.

Flame spurted over the juggernaut's hood! Mike Dohenty spun around. For one instant the badge on his chest, the familiar "2222" star he'd worn all these years, winked at Hamill.

And then the badge blotted out under a dark gout of blood as Mike Dohenty crashed to the pavement.

Murder! That fellow had killed Dohenty, done that rather than be pinched for running through a red light!

Ed Hamill tugged at his own gun, sprang forward. Again flame telegraphed over the other car's hood. Hot, numb pain tore Hamill's shoulder. The slam of the slug turned him half-around. His hand jerked up, triggered. But Hamill was out in the open, uncovered. Back of the motor, the killer's gat spat a third time.

ED HAMILL lurched. Spinning black gripped him. Relentless black opened a terrible tunnel before his glazing eyes. The gun clattered out of Ed Hamill's hand. His lifeless legs buckled. He sprawled on the wet, cold pavement. Like a beaten fighter on the canvas, Hamill twitched. His arms and shoulders made spasmodic movements. By a terrible effort, he managed to lift his head six inches off the concrete.

Now his dimming eyes contracted, concentrated. Through the spinning black, he saw Mike Dohenty's face staring at him. Fingers of ice closed on Ed Hamill's heart.

His lips writhed. Mumbled sound spilled over his slack tongue.

He said, "Sure—we'll take him—Mike—sure—"

But the face of Mike Dohenty dis-

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solved in a cloud of black. Hamill shuddered. His face bumped onto the pavement. This time he did not twitch. He lay there still, as utterly still as his dead friend.

First Grade Detective Ed Hamill quietly closed the oaken door which was brass-lettered *Homicide Bureau.* Seen by daylight, he was a big man with a torso like the trunk of a tree. His thick, long legs planted firmly onto the rubber-matted floor of the outer office. Hospital pallor drained his broad, frowning face.

"So we're going to work together from now on!" young Westerby said.

Ed Hamill did not reply. He held a cigar in the left corner of his mouth. His lips tightened and then relaxed. A blanket of smoke slowly climbed before his large, brown eyes.

Young Westerby said, "I'm tickled as hell to be paired up with you, Ed."

Hamill's eyes pivoted in their sockets. That way, without turning his head, he glanced at young Westerby. His inspection started at the floor. It considered Westerby's gray, wing-tipped, perforated oxfords. A break about six inches above the cuff cut the sharp crease in Westerby's flannels. Hamill's gaze stopped again when it got as high as the pastel tinted, pin-striped mauve shirt with its cream-hued tie.

Westerby wore a gray light felt. Under the brim his face was surprisingly lean. But the blanket of smoke climbed again before Hamill's eyes, blotted out Westerby entirely.

In the smoke haze, Hamill seemed to see another man standing there. That man wore a [illegible]ped shoes that were laced in an old-fashioned and criss-cross manner. His brown suit fitted loosely, almost untidily. His unbuttoned coat showed wrinkled bulges of shirt between trousers and vest. His derby pushed high up from his forehead.

The face of the man in the smoke haze looked at Ed Hamill, just as it had looked at him through the spinning black that night at Boul' and Lexington corner. Just as it had looked at him through the rifted fog of chloroform. Ed Hamill shivered, ever so little.

Surely young Westerby could not have seen that face in the cigar smoke. But perhaps he did notice the shiver.

He said awkwardly, "Naturally, I don't expect to take Mike Dohenty's place alongside of you—"

Hamill's lips jerked around the cigar.

"Wait outside for me, kid."

ALONE in the office, Hamill's brown stare went around the room. There was not much to look at. A pair of roll-top desks flanked the single, wide window. Dust filmed the desks. A squat cuspidor halved the distance between them. On the bare plaster wall hung pictures of the Mayor and the Chief of Police.

Something else hung on the wall. On the side opposite the pictures was screwed a plain oak box, fronted with a glass pane and backed with green billiard cloth. About three dozen police stars were ranged in rows across that cloth. Under each badge was a gummed paper strip, with writing that could not be distinguished across the room.

And above the box appeared a black enamel plaque on which shone a dim gold-leaf wreath, and the words:

OUR HEROIC DEAD
Killed in Line of Duty

Ed Hamill started across the room. His walk was slightly peculiar, yet

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there was nothing wrong with his legs. The trouble lay in the way he held the upper part of his body. He seemed to be favoring his left shoulder, somehow.

Hamill went to the farthest roll-top desk, opened one of the drawers. The drawer contained a pipe, an empty tobacco can, and a receipted gas bill; several street car tokens, an ink-pad that was completely dry, a face towel, and a key ring. Hamill took the key ring. Again, favoring his left shoulder against the slight jar of his footsteps on the rubber-matted floor, he walked on. His thick, rather pale fingers selected the smallest key on the ring.

In a moment he had unlocked the wooden case on the wall.

His face set in stern, hard lines. The skeins of cigar smoke rose in faster rhythm from his lips. He stared at the last badge on the lowest row. It was numbered 2222. The strip of gummed paper underneath repeated the number, and the name, *Michael Dohenty*.

Hamill unpinned Badge 2222 from the billiard cloth. His fingers shook slightly as he did that. He opened his coat, removed the star that was affixed there. Hamill carefully put that badge into the box, and attached 2222 to his chest, almost exactly over his heart.

He closed and relocked the cabinet. A skein of cigar smoke slowly melted and became nothing behind the glass. There was no change evident to the casual glance.

Hamill spoke softly, slowly.

He said, "We'll bring him in, Mike."

His fingers went slowly over the 2222 badge. Then, abruptly, he buttoned his coat.

On the street, young Westerby asked: "Want me to drive?"

"No."

"I thought maybe on account of your shoulder—being just out of the hospital—"

Hamill repeated stonily, "No."

II

THE two detectives got into the black, official car. Hamill drove, keeping his stare fixed on the street. Young Westerby glanced hesitantly at the older man.

He said, "I know how you feel about it. The whole Force does. We tried every damn way to crack the case."

Hamill's lips were frozen around his cigar.

After another moment of hesitation, young Westerby went on: "It all seemed so damn pointless—I mean, no motive. You two weren't traffic cops. It was mere circumstance that you should have hit that light at just that time. If we could figure the crook was somebody you'd picked up sometime—if we could figure revenge—but, hell! Nothing panned out."

Hamill said, "Yeah."

"There had to be some reason. You don't shoot cops to save yourself being hauled in for running a light. Even if the car was stolen, that alone wouldn't be enough."

Hamill said, "Yeah," wearily.

"There wasn't a damn thing we could work on. A man with his arm in a sling—we checked around all the hospitals on that angle." Westerby sighed. "I was on the Stolen Car and Accident Detail then. We did pick up a green sedan—stolen earlier that night and abandoned—over at Boul' and the River. No prints, though. We checked over some cigarette ashes and—"

Hamill scowled. His lids pulled down slightly. He snapped, "For God's sake, quit chewing on it!"

Young Westerby's lean face twisted;

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worried. "I just thought we might have overlooked some angle, some detail—"

"Oh, hell."

It was Westerby's turn to stare at the street. He said in a low tone, "I'm sorry, but I thought we were working together on it, Ed."

Hamill drew a long, slow breath. A hard light came glittering into his eyes. His voice sank to a growl. "Look here, kid. The Chief paired us up—God knows why! But he says you work with me. So okay, officially you do. Maybe I'm supposed to teach you the ropes. Okay, I'll do that, too." His lips jerked angrily. "But not on this case! I'm damned if I'll turn Mike Dohenty's murder into a kindergarten class for you!"

Westerby's lean face burned in a slow, hot flush. He said, "I didn't mean—"

"Ah-h, can it!" Raw emotion exploded in Hamill's voice. "Mike was my friend—pal—and I don't want to talk about it. That's final."

They drove the rest of the way in silence.

Hunched over the wheel, Hamill plodded through his own bitter thoughts. Maybe he wasn't giving young Westerby a decent break. But then, the hell with Westerby. Hamill could handle this alone—had to handle it that way—had to break the man who'd killed Dohenty.

He had his own methods, Hamill had.

He stopped the car in front of the Beulah Apartments on Spring Street. It was the kind of neighborhood where the arrival of a police car caused no particular interest. It was not high class enough to be shocked, and not low class enough to be scared.

"Now, you let me handle this," Hamill said. "You come along, because that's regulations. But keep your mouth shut. Let me do the talking. See?"

HAMILL plodded into the building, rang the janitor's bell. A middle-aged, respectable looking man answered. Hamill jerked wide his coat, flashed the 2222 badge. "We're going into the second floor front," Hamill said. "You got a key?"

"The door might be latched inside—"

"We'll take care of that!"

The janitor unlocked the second floor front door, and there was no latch inside. Hamill lunged in, his gun stuck out in front of him.

"Sit still, Haggis!" he snapped.

The man in there sat still, his sock-clad feet on the living room table. A radio on the mantel blared out a baseball game. Cigarette butts strewed the fire in front of the gas fireplace. There hadn't been a fire lit there in months, and cottony bolls of dust blocked the grate holes.

Hamill's gaze swept the room. He went over the mobster for a weapon. Holding his gun on Haggis, he circled the place; glanced into the other rooms. "It seems you're all alone, Slaughter," he said. "Your pals are kinda giving you the run-around since you turned cop-killer? You know, that ain't healthy in this town."

Slaughter Haggis kept his hands on his belly, folded. He said, "I don't know what you're getting at. Or what business you got busting in here."

Westerby closed the door on the janitor.

Still pointing a gun at Slaughter, Hamill said grimly, "You're going to pay us back the call. Right away.

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You're going down to headquarters with me, mug."

"For what?"

"Murder," Hamill said. "You shot and killed Mike Dohenty on the early morning of July 10, at the corner of Boul' and Lexington."

Slaughter said, "That's funny."

"All right, you laugh for me," Hamill said. His lips pulled down at the corners. "Laugh this off. You had your arm in a sling up to a week ago. It was treated by a Doc Saunders. That ties up with my first statement on this case. And the messenger kid's story. A guy with his arm in a sling, he said."

In the pause, the radio blared: "A fast ball, inside and low—"

Young Westerby stepped across the room, clicked off the radio.

Slaughter Haggis unfolded his hands, shook a cigarette from a pack on the table, and lighted it.

He grunted. "A lot of guys might have had their fins in wraps about that time."

Hamill scowled. "Yeah? And how many of 'em had reason to shoot police on sight?" His mouth made a grim crease. "I'm tieing a rope around your neck, Haggis. I looked you up. You were wanted in Chicago on a bank robbery charge. You didn't dare be picked up that night, for fear we'd send you back there!"

Slaughter laughed. "You can send me back any time you want. Maybe you don't read the papers, but the only identifying witness in that bank robbery case dropped dead of heart failure the other day."

HAMILL pulled up a chair, sat down across the table from the crook. He said, "Keep your feet where they are and put your hands back of your head. Now, listen! I'm not sending you back to Chicago or anywhere's else. No matter who died since, you had plenty of reason not to be picked up that night. Reason enough to kill Dohenty, and that's what you'll swing for."

Slaughter said, "You can't make a case."

Hamill played his ace. "Wait a minute," he said. "Suppose I happened to see your face that night?"

Slaughter trumped the ace. "The kid didn't see no face—according to the papers. You never said anything about seeing a face before, did you? Nuts! No jury is going to fall for that cop identification gag."

Hamill's brown stare hardened. As a matter of fact, he was not very sure that he did have a case. And he knew that he had to crack Haggis, some way.

He jerked, "A jury might believe I picked a crook like you for a fall guy. But, fella, you got to admit you cooperated plenty by having your arm in a sling right then!"

Slaughter took a pull at the cigarette. His eyes darkened. He sneered, "Let me tell you something. I got an air-tight triple alibi for the time when Dohenty was killed. About half-past twelve, wasn't it? Well, I stayed in a beer joint named the Red Lantern until one-thirty that morning."

Hamill's jaw dropped. Hell, if Slaughter had an alibi—but he couldn't have!

Hamill grated, "A month ago! You think anybody at the Lantern's going to remember when you left there—if you even were there?"

"Naw. Not the waiters, of course not. They don't remember nobody that long." Slaughter smirked. "But I got three other people will remember it."

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Young Westerby's voice murmured, "Three?"

Hamill shot a warning glance at Westerby. He said, "The hell you have, Haggis."

Slaughter grinned. "Three. A doll named Maxie Endicott. A couple of punks named Myerman and Schisley."

"Crooks!" Hamill rapped.

"None of 'em got records. I guess their word in court will be as good as yours." The hoodlum smiled.

A frown deepened on Hamill's face. The fact that the trio were crooks worried him; he knew how hard it was to shake the kind of a story that gang would have built up—with the help of a mouthpiece, likely.

Slaughter Haggis kept on smiling. "Maybe you want to swear they was in the machine with me? That would go down swell. Especially since you swore at the inquest you couldn't identify nobody in the car."

Baffled fog grew in Hamill's mind. He'd come here to crack Slaughter, and instead Slaughter was cracking him—a little, anyhow.

He gritted, "That alibi won't keep me from taking you down to headquarters!"

"Naw. But you won't have no chance to work me over. My lawyer will see to that," Slaughter said.

"Prepared, ain't you?"

Slaughter shrugged. Young Westerby walked past Slaughter's chair, went to the mantel again. He said, "Do you mind if I take one of your cigars?"

"Go ahead," Slaughter grunted.

Young [illegible] took the cigar, shrugged as the [illegible] leaf tobacco flindered between his fingers. He jeered, "Rotten rope, Haggis. How do you stand 'em?"

"I don't." The mobster blinked. "They ain't mine. One of my friends must've just left them there."

Hamill's throat formed a growl. "The hell with his cigars," he muttered. "I'm taking him downtown. Now."

III

YOUNG Westerby's eyes met the older detective's. His gaze was unflinching. He said, "Well, there's no hurry. Maybe it's like Haggis says. Maybe he didn't do it, and maybe his lawyer will spring him, anyway."

Hamill gave Westerby a clouded, angry stare. Westerby smiled right through the stare. He said, "I was just thinking. This smells a lot like the kind of cigar a punk like Schisley would smoke."

"Yeah? It happens to be Myerman's though," grunted Slaughter.

Young Westerby did not light the smoke. He turned it over in his hand, smelled it, laid the perfecto back on the mantel.

"Come to think of it," he said, "Schisley don't smoke cigars at all, does he?"

"I never noticed," Slaughter said. Small eyes rolled uneasily in the man's face. "Why—what the hell's this got to do with it?"

"Not a thing." Hamill watched a grin grow on young Westerby's face. For a moment he felt a wild hope that maybe the kid had blundered into something. Then he heard Westerby say:

"I was really thinking about something else. That alibi of yours, Haggis. It sounds kind of funny to me. You three guys there dancing with just the one girl—"

Slaughter threw back his head into his cupped hands and laughed.

Hamill's lips tightened. Young

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Westerby was making a sap of himself—just about what Hamill had expected, too!

"Nuts. That's the screwiest yet. Myerman don't dance—don't even know how. Him and me stayed in the booth all the time, me on account of my bum wing. Maxie danced with Schisley, and we all had drinks—"

Young Westerby jumped toward the mobster. His eyes flamed. He yelled, "It checks! Yes, sir, it checks! Schisley told us the truth!"

Across the table, Hamill's eyes made brown circles.

Slaughter gulped, "What?" Then he pulled himself together.

"You go to hell!" he bawled. "Schisley never told you nothin'! You're trying to play me for a sucker—"

"Hold it!" young Westerby snapped. "I'll tell you what Schisley admitted. Schisley said he and Myerman stole that car out on 40th and Lynn, at ten-thirty. Then they picked up you and Maxie and went to the Red Lantern. But you left there a long time before one-thirty. You went down the Boul' to Lexington, through a light—"

Slaughter laughed.

"Yeah," he said. "Sure. You know when the car was reported stolen. You can figure Schisley and Myerman might have done it, because I ain't that small time a crook. But Schisley never told you nothin'!"

Hamill watched a grin spread across young Westerby's lean face.

"THAT isn't all," Westerby snapped. "Schisley said Myerman did the driving! Schisley said he sat up in front with Myerman! He said this Maxie dame was in the back, on the left hand side, behind Myerman. He said you sat back of him!"

Terror jerked across the mobster's face as Westerby hammered detail on top of detail.

Hamill stared at Westerby, at Slaughter. He heard Westerby's voice crashing on: "Then Myerman slammed through that red light, ran over the bike, got tangled in it. Schisley said you crawled out across Maxie's knees, and ran around in front—"

Slaughter's face worked.

"The punk!" he screamed. "The damn', ratting punk! Turnin' me in to save his own hide—"

He straightened in his chair, feet crashing against the table. The table catapulted over into Hamill's arms, knocked the gun from the detective's hand. Slaughter Haggis whirled. His hand slammed through the frail wood and cloth front of the radio. He jerked away, metal flashing in his fist as he raced toward the door.

"Stop!" yelled young Westerby, gun in hand.

Slaughter had the door open. On the other side of the door was the janitor. Slaughter's fist heeled into the janitor's face, clutched and swung the man.

Slaughter fired, and the slug crashed past young Westerby's head. Westerby had held his own fire because of the janitor. And now Slaughter shoved the janitor toward Westerby. Westerby ducked. Slaughter leveled the gat from the doorway!

On the floor, Hamill curled thick fingers onto his own gun. He fired. Once.

Hamill watched Slaughter Haggis collapse on the doorsill, screaming. Hamill plunged, tore the gat out of the mobster's limp fingers. Slaughter did

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not resist. He clutched his shattered elbow, moaned in pain.

Detective Westerby cried, "He can't beat this rap!" He grabbed the janitor's shoulder, shook the man. "You were listening outside the door—you heard him admit it—and don't you forget!"

The janitor looked wildly at the spot where Slaughter's slug had torn the wall plaster. One hand fumbled over his face, where Slaughter had heeled him.

"No!" he gusted. "I won't forget—not by a hell of a long ways!"

Detective Ed Hamill stood staring at Detective Westerby. The cold cigar drooped at the corner of his mouth. He asked, in a tone of amaze:

"What was that about Schisley confessing? I never heard of Schisley before we walked in here!"

Young Westerby's eyes were brilliant with excitement under the felt hat brim.

"Neither did I. But those small time crooks—Maxie, Myerman, Schisley—had to be in that car. Otherwise they wouldn't be fronting an alibi for Slaughter!"

Hamill blurted, "Sure, I figured that, too! But the rest of it—"

"You mean where they sat?" Young Westerby laughed softly. "I started to tell you the Stolen Car and Accident Detail checked over that abandoned sedan! We found the front axle scratched up, and that could have been done driving over a bicycle. We found a rouge stained cigarette in the left hand corner of the back seat, so it's a natural where the girl sat. There were both cigar and cigarette ashes in front. And around the pedals were muddied cinders—with traces of dance floor wax in them!"

Slaughter lay white-faced, listening.

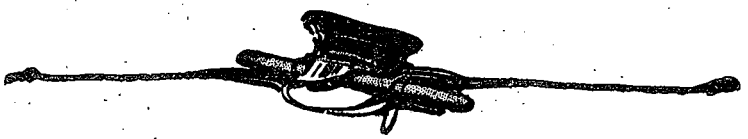
"THE fellow who drove that car picked up those wet cinders and mud at 40th and Lynn, where the car was stolen about ten-thirty that night," Westerby explained. "Later, he had to cross a dance floor to pick up the traces of loose wax. But he couldn't have danced without knocking the stuff entirely from his feet. Myerman didn't dance—and smoked cigars—so he was in front, driving. The cigarette ashes in front were supplied by either Schisley or Slaughter.

"But Slaughter was the one who hopped out of the car. He got out on the left hand side, because neither you nor the telegraph kid saw a door opened on the right side, and also the Boul' curb is too high to let the doors of that sedan swing open. He got out on the street side. Obviously he didn't crawl over the driver—he went out past the girl's knees—"

A slow smile formed on Hamill's face. He said, "We'll take this killer in! And when we do, I wish—"

Hamill paused, fumbled to loosen his coat front. "Of course I got to have this back afterward." He unpinned the badge from over his heart. His thick fingers lingered on the bit of metal, and the smile widened on his face.

"When we take him in," he said, "I—well—I think you ought to be wearing the Four Deuces!"



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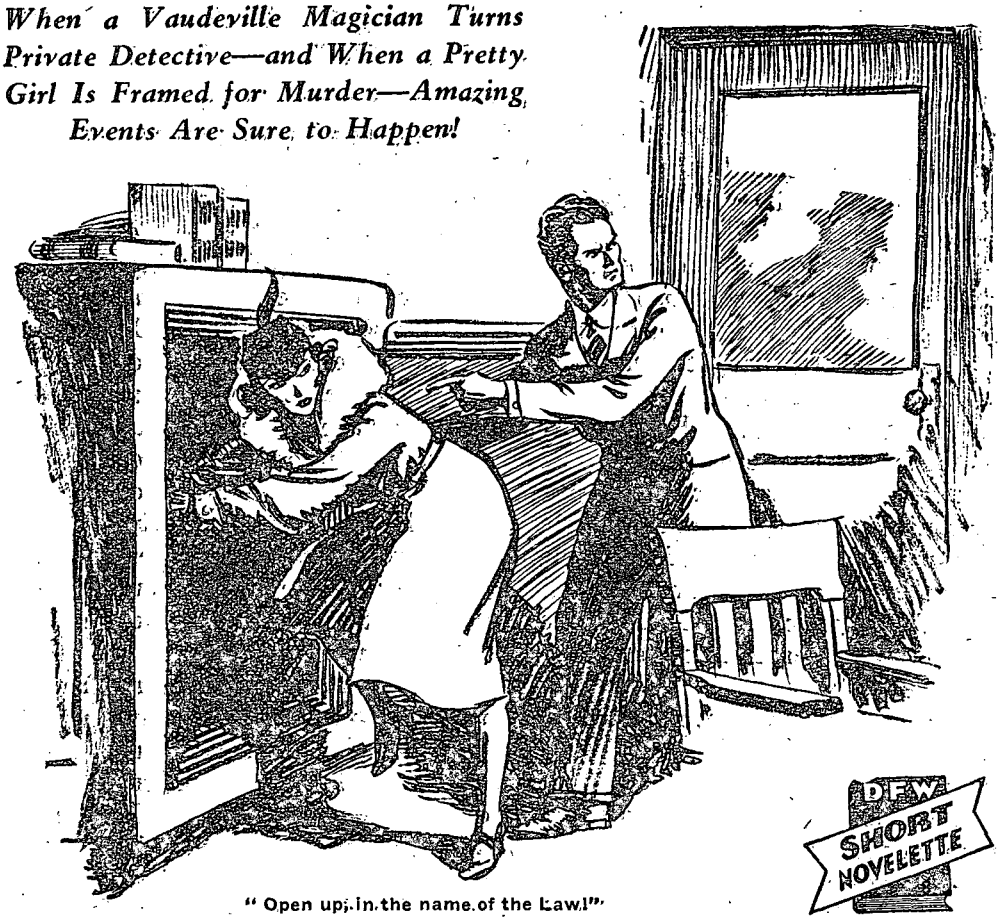
When a Vaudeville Magician Turns Private Detective—and When a Pretty Girl Is Framed for Murder—Amazing Events Are Sure to Happen!



"Open up, in the name of the Law!"

DFW SHORT NOVELETTE

The Accusing Corpse

By Paul Ernst

CHAPTER I

Out of the Storm

BILL CUNNINGHAM was just about to go out to dinner. He put his hat on his head, shrugged his lithe shoulders into an overcoat. His hands—steely, deft hands that could tear a pack of cards in two or manipulate cards, coins or invisible wires with the precision of delicate machines—reached out for the door.

He hesitated an instant and looked at the lettering reversed on the door: WILLIAM CUNNINGHAM, PRIVATE OPERATIVE. He grinned. A few months ago, it had been William Cunningham, Magician, billed on the second-rate vaudeville tours. Then a [redacted] uncle he'd hardly even heard of had died and left him a ridiculously large fortune. After that—private detecting. Why? Well, it was exciting . . . something . . . Cunningham wasn't

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sure that he knew the answer himself. The fact that a private dick who didn't have to think about fees was in a position to help a great many people, he ignored. It sounded too damned silly and noble—

Rapid steps sounded in the corridor outside. A shadow blotted out the lettering. Then the door opened with a bang, and Bill Cunningham was staring at a girl.

She was a pretty girl. Her eyes were smoky gray, and her face was a delicate oval. Furs sheathed her throat; and on the fur as on her long eyelashes, droplets of water from the blizzard raging outside hung pendulous.

A pretty girl—but a very frightened one! She was gasping, and her face was as white as wax.

"For goodness' sake—hide me!" she panted.

Her eyes roamed over the office, then darkened with despair. The office was a plain box of a room, fifteen feet square, with nothing in it but desk and two chairs and a big safe against the wall.

"I've got to get out of hert—"

She turned and would have run out again, but Cunningham grasped her arm. "Wait! What's the matter?"

"The police! They're after me—Let me *go!*"

She was clearly wild with fear. Cunningham drew her forcibly inside the office and shut the door. He liked what he saw in the deep gray eyes, panic-stricken but honest, and in the lovely, wax-white face.

"Why are the police after you? Tell me a little about this. Maybe I can help. That's my business—"

Heavy feet sounded in the hall. They were running too, coming toward Cunningham's closed door. Cunningham promptly slid the catch on the lock.

"Where can I hide?" the girl whispered frantically. "If the police catch me—now—"

Again her desperate eyes went around the office, as bare of hiding places as the Sahara Desert. Then the men outside were at the door. A hand tried the knob, found the door locked. A fist pounded on the panels. "Open dis door!"

Cunningham frowned a little, puzzled.

"Come on. Open dis door before we bust it down!"

Cunningham stared at the girl, and then at the shadows etched against the frosted glass panel. Deliberately his hand went out, and he snapped off the lock. The girl gasped, the door opened, and two men walked in.

THEY were oddly assorted. One was big, with dull, stupid light eyes under a low strip of forehead. The other was thin and under average height, with a thin, sharp nose in a flat face.

"Uh huh. There she is." The smaller man grabbed the girl's shoulder. "Come on, you!"

"Just a minute," said Cunningham pleasantly, as the girl turned imploring eyes on him. He stepped to the side of the small man. "What's the idea?"

"We're takin' this jane in for murder," snarled the big man.

Cunningham stared at the door, and laughed. "Well, you aren't taking me in—for anything. What are you two supposed to be—detectives?"

"Go to hell," grated the small man. "Step on his toes, Stacey. I'll take the g—"

That was as far as he got. Cunningham, still with a smile on his lips, made two moves, so swift and without warning that they seemed to blend into one.

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He shot his right fist against the jaw of the little man, and swung his left elbow backward with terrific power. The little man went down. The big man grunted as the elbow sank deep into his middle. Then he roared and rushed.

Cunningham let him have a left to the jaw that would have floored most men. But this chap weighed over two hundred pounds, and his scarred features betrayed ham prize-fight experience. He only swayed, reached for a gun.

"Well, if one isn't enough," Cunningham commented smoothly, "I will—" smack—"give you a couple more—" smack, smack—"to nail the first one down."

The last words were spoken while Cunningham looked down at the prone body of the big man. The right, left, right to the jaw had nailed the first blow down, all right. The tall man's gun lay where it had fallen on the carpet. Cunningham picked it up and put it in his pocket.

The little man was moaning, and he pushed himself to a sitting position stupidly.

"Get out," said Cunningham, "and drag your ape partner with you."

"You—you'll—" stuttered the little man menacingly.

Cunningham took a step toward him. The fellow shut up in a hurry, bent over his prostrate pal. The big fellow got numbly to hands and knees, shaking his head dazedly. Then, snapping out of it with amazing rapidity, he bellowed, and sprang once more.

He stopped as his own gun swung level with his head. Eyes twitching, he stared into its .45 caliber muzzle.

"Out," repeated Cunningham firmly.

The two—snarling, glaring murder at him—left the office. Cunningham watched while they went down the corridor, saw an elevator swallow them, then turned to the girl.

"Oh," she whispered. "How terrible! I had no right to let you do it. They'll arrest you too—"

"If you think those two were plain-clothes men," said Cunningham, "forget it. They're no more cops than you are."

"They—they said they were—at my apartment. They said—I was under arrest."

Cunningham shook his head. "They're small-time hoods. But now tell me what brings you here, and what brought them here after you. What's your name?"

"Corlene Curtiss. I came to you because my—" the girl colored—"the man I'm to marry mentioned you once. He heard of you through a case a little while ago where you got back some diamonds by playing a sleight-of-hand trick on the suspect. He thought it was funny: a stage magician retiring and going into the detecting business. But I was impressed."

CUNNINGHAM shrugged. "I do have a little edge on most detectives with my bag of tricks. But what pretext did these two men have for faking an arrest?"

Corlene Curtiss shuddered, and her face got, if possible, more bloodless.

"It's about my uncle. Maybe you've heard of him—Alvin Curtiss, the inventor. Oh, it's horrible! I—"

Down the hall, a second time, sounded heavy steps. These were not running steps, however. They came inexorably toward the office door. Cunningham flipped the lock again, staring at the girl.

"Maybe your friends have come back with reinforcements—"

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The door shook to a measured rapping.

"Open up, in the name of the Law!"

The difference between this voice and the one that had demanded entrance a few minutes before was subtle but impossible to define. A sort of calm, a certain indifference in this voice, perhaps, that had not been in the other. The men outside the door this time *were* cops!

The girl moistened dry lips.

"Whatever you've done," Cunningham whispered into her ear, "it might be best to give up. Bad business to run—"

"You don't know what's happened!" the girl breathed back. "I've got to keep away from them, for a little while. But there's no place to hide here. . . ."

The door banged a second time. "Open this door, Cunningham."

Cunningham went to the safe in two noiseless strides. He beckoned the girl. . . .

Then, leisurely, he went to the door and unlocked it. Three men, undeniably and obviously plainclothes men, came in. In the lead was a city detective named Montgomery. Cunningham knew him by sight, and disliked him. He was a blood-hound, devoid of all personal feeling; a law-enforcing machine.

"The girl that came in here," he began, cold eyes probing Cunningham's. "We want her."

"Girl?" murmured Cunningham.

"Don't stall." The three closed threateningly around him. "We know she came here."

"How would you know that?"

"The classified phone book was open in her apartment, and a pencil mark was opposite your name in the Private Detectives listing. Besides, out in front is the cab driver who brought her here. We talked to him."

"You can see in about three seconds that there's no one in here but me, and you three. The office isn't very complicated, gentlemen."

Montgomery's thin lips drew back from his teeth. "Don't mix in this case, Cunningham," he said coldly. "I know your rep—an amateur dick with pull enough to get a license, working for nothing most of the time because you think you're helping somebody. Getting your nose in business that don't concern you! Why a cheap vaudeville magician thinks he has what it takes to be a detective—" Montgomery choked and stopped. Then he said: "We want that girl, Cunningham."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

Montgomery thrust his ax-blade face within six inches of the ex-magician's.

"Don't stick your neck out, sap. You don't want a rap for harboring murderers, do you?"

"Murderers?" repeated Cunningham sharply. "*That* girl?" he started to say. But he bit the words back.

"Yeah, that's what I said. The girl is a killer. She just murdered her uncle, old Alvin Curtiss, the inventor."

CHAPTER II

Frame

FOR a moment Cunningham saw Montgomery's lips move without hearing the words. He was too busy remembering Corlene's face.

A lovely face, delicately oval—but murderesses have often had delicate, lovely faces. Nice eyes, deep and honest—but crooks have often been pictures of honesty and innocence.

If she *had* killed a man, he was getting into it up to his neck! He knew

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the charges for harboring. They had teeth in them, nowadays! Montgomery, who didn't like him anyway, could fix his lights—

He laughed. "Here's the office. Go ahead and find a girl in it. As you see, I couldn't hide a needle in this place, let alone a girl."

Montgomery glared at him, then walked to the big desk. He looked behind it. Nobody was there. He stared around the room. One desk, two chairs, one safe. That was all.

"I'm telling you once more to come clean, Cunningham," he droned. "We've got this girl cold. Her compact was found beside the dead man, and a few minutes later, in her apartment, we found the gun she shot him with, in an old purse. She's as good as in the chair. Or maybe only sent up for life, being a swell looker."

"I don't see why you're so sure—just because you found a pencil mark after my name in a phone book—" Cunningham began.

Montgomery pointed grimly to the floor. Cunningham looked.

There, faintly imprinted in the nap of the carpet and dimly outlined with moisture from the sleety street outside, was the mark of a woman's shoe.

Cunningham smiled. "Any one of a million women in the city might have made that mark. Anyhow, I repeat, as you can see for yourselves there is no girl in this office."

Montgomery's eyes went to the safe.

"That's pretty big just to keep papers in," he said slowly.

"I have a lot of papers."

"I'd like a look in it," snapped Montgomery.

"In the safe? Good night! You think I hide people in—"

"Open it up," droned Montgomery.

Cunningham opened his mouth as if to protest again, then shut it without speaking. Slowly he walked to the safe, and reluctantly his hands worked at the combination knob. The three city detectives bent over his shoulder.

He opened the thick steel door, and revealed a thoroughly empty safe.

Montgomery glared coldly at him. Obviously in his mind were confused suspicions resting on Cunningham's vaudeville past. He thrust his arm into the safe, and his hand touched the back.

"Do you think I'm pulling some sort of trick with mirrors?" said Cunningham. "As you see, it's empty."

Wordlessly, Montgomery went to the door.

"All right, you're asking for it," he flung over his shoulder. "You'll get it—if you don't turn Corlene Curtiss over to us."

He went out. As he had done before, Cunningham watched the men go to the elevator, and saw the elevator receive them. But this time, in addition, he stepped to the office window and stared down at the snow-swept street.

He saw the three detectives walk across the sidewalk, holding coat collars up against the blizzard, and saw them get into a squad car and drive off. Not till then did he go back to the safe.

He opened it. Again the plain steel back was revealed. He reached to it, and touched the side. It swung backward and showed the next office, which was vacant as far as could be seen from the corridor but which was carefully rented by Cunningham under another name.

THE girl crawled back into the lighted office through the steel portal of the backless safe. The back snicked into place, and she faced Cunningham.

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"Thank you so much. . . . Oh, I don't know how to thank you!"

Cunningham's eyes were expressionless. "You might begin by explaining," he said evenly. "A murder charge is a serious thing."

"I didn't kill my uncle! He was like a father to me—"

"I'm waiting," said Cunningham.

The girl clenched her slender hands for composure. "This is what happened:

"Two hours ago, I called my uncle and asked if I could come and get a check from him. I was overdrawn at the bank. He said, of course. He was very indulgent with me. I left my apartment on the North Side in a cab. It takes about a half hour for me to get from my place to his, usually. Today, because of the snow, it took the cab almost forty-five minutes. I got there and rang the bell."

She shivered and clenched her lip in her teeth.

"The door wasn't answered either by my uncle or any of the servants. Then I remembered it was the servants' day off. I took out my key to his place and went in. He was in the library. . . ."

Corlene's throat quivered. She stared out the window at the blinding snow for nearly a minute before she could go on.

"He was in the library, lying near the door. There was a—a bullet hole in his head. On the table were some legal-looking documents, having something to do with a settlement he was making on me, I think. I stood looking at him, and there was a ring at the door. I was frantic. But I answered. I thought it might be Spencer—"

"Spencer?" interrupted Cunningham.

"Spencer Morgan, the man I'm to marry," Corlene said. She went on. "I thought it might be Spencer and that he could tell me what to do. But I called through the door before opening it, and a man answered that the police were outside. I—lost my head entirely, and ran. I was alone in that house with a man who had just been murdered. I went out the back way. I hardly remember getting a cab and going back to my apartment. I wanted to call Spencer, but he was out. Then I remembered your name. Oh, I suppose I made a mistake when I ran."

"I think," said Cunningham, "in view of the fact that the two men who trailed you here was not cops but fakes, that you probably saved your life when you ran. Your mistake wasn't in running, it was in leaving a compact lying by the dead man."

Corlene stared. "A compact?"

"Yes. Montgomery, one of our detective friends, said that a compact of yours had been found beside your uncle, and they'd also found the gun that killed him in your apartment."

The girl was white to the lips.

"I—didn't leave a compact there." She rummaged hastily through her brown leather bag. "No, here's the one I left home with. I didn't see another there—though I was so excited I could have overlooked it."

"How about the gun?"

"I've never owned a gun. I wouldn't even know how to shoot one."

Cunningham stared at her for a long time. A beautiful, open face; deep, honest eyes. "I'm going to believe you," he said slowly. "Believing you, I can only work on the theory that you've been framed. Very badly! For there is an obvious motive for you to murder your uncle. You're his heir, and he was a rich man."

"But I didn't have to kill him for money," wailed Corlene. "He was the

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soul of generosity. Why, he was going to give me a hundred thousand dollars as a wedding present, three weeks from now when Spencer and I were to be married. I know that for a fact. I heard him telephone his lawyer, who handles his money, to make the necessary arrangements."

"Lawyer who handles his money? Didn't he handle his own?"

Corlene shook her head.

"My uncle is—was—a dreamy and impractical man, as many inventors are. He had the big criminal lawyer, John Geeza, take care of his money for him. Mr. Geeza is a life-long friend. I was—going to see him after leaving you."

CUNNINGHAM shook his head positively. "You'll see no one. You're going to keep hiding, from the police and every one else, as long as you've started that way."

He considered. "Montgomery is a bulldog. He'll have a man posted at the door of this building to see if you come out, even though his search here would indicate that you'd already gone. I guess you'd better put up next door."

He stepped to the safe and opened it back and front and again. Corlene bent down to go through to the next office.

"How can I thank you—?"

"Nothing to thank me for, yet," he said. "Better leave now, before the police decide to come back and look through this office again. There's a leather divan in the next room, and a small refrigerator. I think you can find enough for a cold supper."

He shut the safe door after the girl's exit, and walked to the window. Absently he stood looking down into the swirling snow, which was lit at the sidewalk by the building floodlamps.

A murdered man. A girl accused of the murder, and with an all too logical motive for it. She mustn't be caught for a little while. With such an obvious suspect in their hands, the police would call the case solved and work no further on it.

The girl's compact on the floor near the body, and the death gun in her apartment!

A beautiful frame! Who had engineered it? Why? And why had two choice gunmen gone to the house at just the right time to find the girl with the dead man, and then trailed her to her apartment and finally to this office? And how had the bona fide cops learned that murder had been done? Who had tipped them off?

Cunningham began recalling facts about Spencer Morgan, whom Corlene had said she was engaged to marry. Wealthy family. Fortune gone in the crash. Spencer Morgan continuing to play along in the society columns anyway, reported now with this rich girl and now with that one. Out to marry money, obviously.

Morgan could have sneaked a compact from Corlene, could have got into her apartment and planted the gun. But why would he frame a girl who was to bring him management of a fortune in a few weeks when he married her—?

Suddenly Cunningham stiffened as he stared down at the sidewalk. His eyes became alert but incredulous.

A girl was crossing the walk swiftly, with fox furs up around her face to keep the lights from revealing it too plainly. That trim, crisp walk—the furs—!

Cunningham jumped to the door, into the corridor and to the next office. He unlocked it and swung the door wide. "Miss Curtiss! Corlene!"

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She wasn't there. The room was empty. On the leather davenport was a note, written in eyebrow pencil: "I know a place where I can stay hidden for a day or two. I'll phone you when I get there. I couldn't stay here and drag you into this—make you risk losing your license or even getting put into jail. C. C."

Cunningham cursed between his teeth. If that wasn't like a woman! But there was reluctant admiration in his keen eyes, all the same. Game kid! Her heart was in the right spot, even if her notions of what would be helpful to him were all wet.

The latter thought sent him running for the door and down the corridor. Corlene hadn't a chance of getting away from this building, and after they picked her up. . . .

The elevator door opened. Cunningham veered from that and toward the stairs. But he was too late. Two men jumped from the elevator. One of them was Montgomery.

"Stop where you are, Cunningham," he snapped. "We've got you now, you three-a-day wizard. We just picked up the girl around the corner. You get yours for hiding her. You'll be put on ice for a few years, for all your dough and your pull!"

Cunningham stood with hands raised. It was on the tip of his tongue to jeer and ask Montgomery how he intended to prove that, out of the whole building she had come from, the girl had been in his particular office.

But he didn't do that. In his pocket crackled the note from Corlene, written in eyebrow pencil, thanking him for shielding her. They had him where the hair was short!

"I'm going to put cuffs on you," growled Montgomery, coming slowly closer. "I know what a slippery devil you are. I'll take no chances. But if you're good on the way to headquarters, I'll stick you in a cell near the girl's."

CHAPTER III

The Test

CUNNINGHAM'S face remained expressionless. But behind it his brain was racing. If he were taken in to headquarters now, he was through! Washed up! Montgomery hated him thoroughly, and would see that he'd get a real rap for harboring a murderer. Yes, a murderer—for the girl was washed up, too, if those cuffs went around his wrists. Loose, he might do something to really clear up this case. Behind bars. . . .

He made one effort.

"Look," he said. "You've apparently got the goods on me. All right, I won't waste your time and mine by trying to explain. But let me report to headquarters, myself, in the morning. I give you my word I will."

Montgomery sneered. "Yeah? By morning you'd be a thousand miles away, to stay till you'd hired smart lawyers to clear you. Stick out your hands."

"But I promise—"

"Stick out the mitts and shut up," was Montgomery's sour interruption.

Cunningham had admitted that he might have an edge over most detectives because of his stage-magician's training. It would have been false modesty not to admit it: One of the points of his superiority was the lightning coördination of his movements, engendered by his former routine. A man making his living by moving his hands faster than the eye can see, and by utilizing incredible strength to pull off some of his illusions, learns to act

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with unbelievable quickness and precision.

Cunningham moved that way now. He had his hands out for the cuffs, and Montgomery was reaching with the clanking steel bracelets in his own left hand. His right still held his gun on the private detective. The steel touched Cunningham's right wrist.

Cunningham's hands seemed to blur —and Montgomery's gun was knocked aside while his left hand tingled with the force with which the handcuffs had been torn from it. The detective behind Montgomery yelled and jabbed with his gun to shoot, but Montgomery was in the way.

"Damn you—" panted Montgomery, recovering from his second of stupefaction. He swung his right, and the next instant he was reeling back toward the other city man as Cunningham thrust out his arms with the force of a mule's kick. Montgomery hit his pal and fell. Next second, the pal fell too, as a handcuff swung with terrific force in Cunningham's hand got him on top of the head.

Cunningham leaped over the two and got to the head of the stairs, beside the elevator shaft. His eyes flicked to the elevator indicator. There was a cage two floors above this one.

"Stop!" shouted Montgomery, almost incoherent with rage. Cunningham plunged down the stairs two at a time. A bullet cracked behind him, taking a flake out of the marble that lined the stair-well walls.

Cunningham got to the next floor down and ran to the elevators. The one that had been two floors up hit this level as his finger found the button. The doors opened.

"Stop that cage!" yelled Montgomery to the operator.

The man at the controls turned toward Cunningham, face white and questioning.

"Sorry," said Cunningham, and swung. The man sagged.

He shut the cage doors, as slugs ripped through it, and took the control himself, sending the cage down to the lobby. Then, with a minute or so to spare, he walked swiftly but unobtrusively to the street, and grabbed a taxi, relaxing with a sigh, as it whirled off into the diminishing snowstorm.

Harboring a killer, resisting arrest, assaulting an officer. . . .

"They'll give me life, now," he mused, grinning bleakly. Then he dismissed the past and went on to the immediate future.

Since he had talked to the girl, one statement of hers had stuck in his mind. She had said that on the library table in the room in which the dead man lay, there were legal-looking documents, "probably having something to do with a settlement he was making on me."

Two things grew out of that statement.

One was that the dead Alvin Curtiss was probably engaged in some legal detail just before he was killed.

The other was that somebody was in a position to know that Corlene had phoned Alvin Curtiss, and was on her way over.

IT added up, Cunningham thought, to the sure total that the person in that library when Alvin Curtiss answered the telephone had killed Curtiss because an opportunity had suddenly been offered to frame the girl for the murder.

And the papers on the table had been *legal* papers.

"Stop at this drugstore for a minute," he called to the cab driver. The

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man stopped beside a corner drug-store, and Cunningham went in to a booth. He had a little experiment to make.

He looked up the phone number of John Geeza, attorney at law, and called it. After a moment a slow, impressive voice informed him that he was speaking to Mr. Geeza.

"My name is Cunningham," the private detective said smoothly. "You don't know me. But Miss Corlene Curtiss just visited me in my office and retained me to track down whoever killed her uncle a few hours ago—"

There were inarticulate sounds from the phone.

"Yes, Alvin Curtiss has been murdered," Cunningham said. "The papers will have it in another few minutes. And Miss Curtiss has been accused of that murder. Because things look so bad for her, I advised her to hide out for a time till I could get in touch with you. She said you were an old family friend, and would arrange help—"

"Yes, yes!" came the lawyer's hurried voice. "I'll begin preparing her defense at once. But I must talk with her—"

"She's registered at the Carling Hotel under the name of Jane Gary," Cunningham said. "But put the talk with her off for a few hours, will you? I'd like to see you in your office at once. It will take me about twenty minutes to get there."

He hung up, and went back to his cab. The Carling Hotel was within four blocks of the store; the main reason why he had given that as his fake, test address. He had the cab drive to it and then park just around the corner, so that he could see along the street.

Just eleven minutes passed when a sedan stopped with a jerk in front of the entrance. Two men got out, trying their best to walk and act like cops. They went into the building. One was big, heavily built, with a ham prize-fighter's face which had been recently bruised. The other was small, with a sharp nose in a flat face.

Just one man on earth could have sent these two to the place where Corlene Curtiss was supposed to be hiding. John Geeza. Cunningham gave the address of the lawyer's office to the cab driver, and told him to hurry. . . .

He got there four minutes past his twenty-minute estimate. Geeza himself escorted him through the anteroom and into his private office. Geeza was a fattish man with a courtly Vandyke and a courteous manner. But his courtesy was marred by agitation.

"How terrible!" he was fizzing. "Alvin, my old friend, murdered, and his niece accused of the murder! But that's absurd, of course."

"Not so absurd," said Cunningham. "There's a strong case against her—"

The door of the next office opened, and a young man with wavy blond hair and the statuesque good looks of a life-saver came in.

"Did I hear something said about Corlene—and murder?" he asked, looking from one to the other. "What has happened?"

"This is Spencer Morgan," said Geeza to Cunningham. He told Corlene's fiancé what had been told to him. "The poor girl! We must act at once to help her!"

"Naturally," said Spencer Morgan. "Where is she? I must go to her!"

"Only Mr. Geeza and I know where she is," Cunningham said. He smiled, while behind the smile was the picture of those two gunmen, representing themselves as detectives, who had gone

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to the ostensible address of the girl's hideout eleven minutes after that address had been given to the lawyer.

"Now about her defense," said Geeza.

CUNNINGHAM waved his hand. He had to act pretty fast. The presses even now grinding out news of Curtiss' murder, would be held for the last-minute flash that Curtiss' niece had been captured as the guilty person. But the news would be out soon. And then he'd be through as far as Geeza was concerned.

"I wanted to see you about the defense." He looked at Morgan and Geeza. "You're Miss Corlene Curtiss' best friends. So I can tell you both. I have in my office a bit of evidence that absolutely clears Miss Curtiss—and as absolutely proves that Alvin Curtiss was murdered by another person who was in his library just before the girl came."

Morgan started violently. Geeza stared at Cunningham with his mouth open.

"Good heavens!" said Geeza, after a moment. "But how excellent! What is the evidence?"

"I'd rather let you see it for yourself than try to tell about it," said Cunningham.

"Why didn't you bring it here, man, so we could get to work at once?"

Cunningham looked around in the furtive manner of a very dumb stage dick.

"Somebody has framed Miss Curtiss," he said in a low tone. "That's almost certain. Now—if the person who framed her ever found out I was carrying evidence of her innocence around with me, he'd take it away from me, wouldn't he? So I left it in my office safe. If you'll meet me in forty-five minutes, I'll turn it over to you. You too, Mr. Morgan."

Morgan and Geeza looked quickly at each other, and then back at Cunningham.

"Why can't we go right away?" said Morgan.

"I have something I must do first. A routine matter that can't be put off. And a forty-five-minute delay won't make any difference. Is it agreed?"

"Of course," said Geeza. "And I only hope you are right. Evidence that Corlene is innocent. . . . I pray that you're right!"

Cunningham rose. "In three-quarters of an hour, then, at my office."

He went out, down to his waiting cab, and then he gave an address that would have made a listener cognizant of the facts think he was insane.

"Police headquarters," he said to the driver. "Fast!"

Detective Montgomery was in his office. He got up so fast his chair fell over backwards as Cunningham walked in. His face went purple.

"You — you —" he stuttered. "Damn you—you're under arrest."

He jumped to Cunningham and gripped his arm as though fearing the ex-wizard might do a disappearing trick under his very nose.

Cunningham shook his grip off. "Listen, Montgomery, and listen fast. I can deliver the real murderer of Alvin Curtiss to you in about three-quarters of an hour if you'll act with me."

"Trying to weasel again, eh?" stormed Montgomery. "Well, this is one time you won't get away—"

"Would I have walked right into your arms if I wanted to get away? Dosen't my reporting here prove that I'm acting—or trying to act—in good faith? Work with me for an hour or

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d I'm telling you I'll give you urtiss killer. You can take six es along with us if you like, to e sure I don't escape."

Montgomery was chewing his lip d glaring at the private detective ith a blend of anger and profound spicion in his eyes.

"What do you want to do?" he grated.

"Talk to Corlene Curtiss first," Cunningham said. "Then call on a bank with a warrant to search a certain safe deposit box. Get a quick warrant, and let me see Miss Curtiss."

A MOMENT later he saw Corlene through bars and a heavy mesh screen. Her chin was up, proudly, gamely; but above that chin were lips that would quiver a little.

"Mr. Cunningham—Bill—" she faltered. "Have they arrested you, too?"

"In spirit," said Cunningham, "but not in fact. What bank did your uncle do business with, Corlene?"

"The Second National," she said.

"Did he have his safety deposit box there, too?"

"Yes."

"Does Mr. John Geeza have access to it?"

"Of course," said the girl. "I told you Mr. Geeza handled Uncle Alvin's money. He went to the box far oftener than Uncle Alvin did, taking care of mortgages and coupons. But why—"

"Tell you later," said Cunningham hurriedly. "Now I'm off, with Detective Montgomery, to have a look in your uncle's box."

The search warrant caught up with Mon[illegible]ery and Cunningham at the bank. The cashier, summoned from home, met them too. Fortunately there wasn't a time lock on this vault. It could be opened at night.

"I don't know what this is all about, but it had better be good," Montgomery snarled, as they followed the bank cashier into the vault. The cashier got out the big Curtiss box, and Cunningham seized it eagerly.

"This is what it's about," he said. "Lawyer Geeza has handled Alvin Curtiss' affairs for many years. Now, if there is a shortage in the Curtiss accounts . . ."

But when the box was opened, Cunningham blinked with the shock of a fact that struck him like a physical blow.

There was an adding machine column of the box's contents on the top of the pile of securities and mortgages. It went beyond saying that the total must be the total of Curtiss' wealth: After all Curtiss did go to that box occasionally, and a discrepancy in this list, which would stare him in the face the moment he opened the box, would make him ask questions.

And a hasty check of the box's contents showed that they matched the total on the slip! Eight hundred and forty thousand dollars in gilt-edged securities, a couple of hundred more in real estate and mortgages.

Montgomery turned to Cunningham with blood in his eye.

"No shortage here. Sending me out on a wild goose chase against a man as big as John Geeza—"

"Wait a minute," said Cunningham, sweating as his whole house of cards seemed tumbling around his ears. "Wait a minute! There's another angle— Get the bank's list of stolen securities."

Five minutes later, looking over that list, Cunningham exclaimed aloud: "Got him!"

Montgomery shook his head. "This'll mean nothing in court. He

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could have been the goat in what he thought were straight business deals."

Cunningham said: "You'll see! Next call is my office. I'm to meet Geeza and Miss Curtiss' fiancé, Spencer Morgan, there."

But at the elevator door on the floor of the building where he had his office, Cunningham stopped the city detective. He disliked giving away his secret, but it had to be done.

"The office next to mine is supposed to be vacant, but I rent it—"

"So that's where you hid the girl when we were here before!" Montgomery snarled. "Why you—!"

"Save it! There's a dictaphone in there. You can listen to Geeza and me when he gets to the office. I'll try to trap Geeza. I'll seem to be alone, and I think it'll work."

He pointed out the small receiver hanging on the wall of the supposedly vacant office, and closed the door softly on the still wrathful city man. Then he went to the door of his own office.

His jaw was grim. He thought he had the lawyer cornered. He had to corner him! Corlene Curtiss' fate, and to a lesser extent his own, depended on making the man incriminate himself in some way so that the city detective listening in the next office could witness it!

He turned the knob and opened his door. And it was not for over a second, when his hand touched the light switch, that the fact registered on his mind that his door was unlocked, though he had left it fastened!

His hand darted mechanically for his gun—which Montgomery had taken away from him. But even had there been a gun in its accustomed place, the move would have been too late. Something crashed down on his head, and he fell to the floor. He got a dim glimpse of a figure leaping ove and out into the corridor, heard roar of a shot, and then passed out

His consciousness lasted only a minutes. Then his eyes struggled ope

His office was lighted, now. Mon gomery was leaning over him, fac hard as granite. There were hand cuffs on his wrists, Cunningham felt. But the next minute that discovery was swept from his brain by a more mo mentous one.

He could see beyond Montgomery, could see the chair beside the desk. In that chair a figure was slumped, with mouth agape and eyes open and glaring. The figure was that of a man who was very dead, with a bullet hole between the eyes.

It was the body of Spencer Morgan.

CHAPTER IV

From Dead Lips

"FOR cat's sake," said Cunningham, twisting at his handcuffs, "use sense! Do you think I'd bring you here to my office, only to kill a man right under your nose?"

"I don't suppose you meant to bump him off," rasped Montgomery, staring at the corpse of Morgan.

"But what possible motive could I have had?"

"A dozen," growled Montgomery. "Here's one: You planned to double-cross Geeza in some way. You were going to work with Morgan to frame Geeza with the Curtiss murder. You came here. He was here ahead of you. He started to ask you for more dough for his share of the frame, and you realized that I was in the [illegible] office listening, so—"

"So I shot him—with a detective as practically an eyewitness! Be your age, Montgomery."

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The city detective shrugged.

"I heard you open your office door. Then I heard a shot. I came in and found this guy fresh dead, and a gat beside you with a bullet gone."

Cunningham cursed in his impatience.

"You took my gun yourself."

"You could have had another one, maybe, or maybe there was one in here in reach when you opened the door."

"But you found me knocked out. Do you think I socked myself over the head after shooting Morgan?"

Montgomery shrugged again. "Morgan started to hit you when you raised your gun. You killed him, but he finished the blow just as the shot came."

"In spite of the fact that he's sitting down, there, ten feet from where you found me, near the door?"

"Listen. I heard a shot. I came in here and found a dead man and you with a gun practically in your mitt. Okay. That's enough. You've got a murder rap now, instead of one for harboring."

"I tell you Morgan was in that chair, dead, before I opened the door! The man who killed him was behind the door, waiting for me. When I stepped in, he knocked me out, shot his gun, and ran down the corridor. Another frame—that's what it is—"

"Nuts! If what you say had happened, I'd have caught the guy when I ran from the office next door to this."

Cunningham shook his head.

"That shot through the receiver must have knocked your ears half off. I'm betting you hopped around for a minute with your hands over them. But even if you didn't, even if you ran right for the door, whoever killed Morgan would have had time to get around that near bend in the corridor. He was half out the doorway when he fired the shot that was part of the frame—"

"Yeah, 'whoever killed Morgan,'" jeered Montgomery. "And who would that be?"

"Another, besides Morgan and myself, was to visit this office—" began Cunningham.

And then steps in the corridor cut him off. Firm, deliberate steps, coming toward his door.

Cunningham jumped to the swivel chair behind his desk, and sat down in it.

"What the—?" exclaimed Montgomery.

The office door opened, and the lawyer, John Geeza, stepped in. He took one step over the threshold and then stopped, eyes wide with amazement as he stared at the dead man, and then at Cunningham, and finally at Montgomery.

He whispered, wetting his lips: "Spencer Morgan—murdered! Here in this office—what does this mean?"

"It means," said Cunningham crisply, before Montgomery could say anything, "that you're under arrest, Geeza."

CUNNINGHAM had his hands below the edge of his desk so that his handcuffs were not in evidence. He leaned back in the chair and stared at the lawyer. Montgomery shifted and was plainly about to burst into a grim tirade. Cunningham hastened along to prevent it.

"We've got the whole thing worked out—got you cold.

"You handled Alvin Curtiss' money. Taking advantage of that position, you sold his securities at par and substituted stolen securities which you bought at about sixty cents on the dollar. Curtiss wouldn't know a stolen

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bond if he saw one, so you were safe. Then Curtiss' niece got engaged to be married and he arranged to settle a dowry on her. That meant an accounting, and your exposure and a jail sentence."

"My dear sir—" began Geeza coldly.

Cunningham raced on.

"If Curtiss died and Corlene, his heir, disappeared, you would continue to manage the fortune indefinitely, with no accounting to trip you up. You contacted a couple of your gangster clients and laid your plans. You got your chance while you were in Curtiss' library this afternoon, when Corlene called and said she was coming over. You killed Curtiss, put a compact of Corlene's beside the body and called your two thugs. They were to come and fake an arrest for murder. When they got the girl . . . well, she was just to disappear, that was all. Then you called the cops, and planted the death gun in her apartment. Result: The police would assume that Corlene killed her uncle, and would search for her indefinitely while you sat on Curtiss' stolen securities. Only two things spoiled your plan. One was that Corlene got away from your killers and came here. The other was that Spencer Morgan surprised you at Curtiss' house."

Geeza stared at Montgomery.

"You are . . . ?"

"Detective Montgomery, City Bureau," Montgomery snapped.

"Are you, too, behind this insane charge—"

"Spencer Morgan was a rat," Cunningham cut in loudly and firmly. "For plenty of cash he agreed to keep quiet. He was in your office, arranging it, when I barged in. Then you learned that your plan had gone cockeyed, and also that I had 'a piece of evidence' that would 'clear Corlene' and incriminate another person. You were jolted. You came to my office with Morgan with a second frame in mind. Kill Morgan, getting rid of a murder witness and blackmailer, and incriminate me, which would discredit any testimony I could give. So in this office you shot Morgan, and waited for me behind the door. I don't know how you got in in the first place: picked the lock, I suppose, explaining to Morgan that you wanted to search for that piece of evidence I'd mentioned."

"Listen, Cunningham . . ." snarled Montgomery.

Cunningham glared at him warningly, and continued.

"When I came in, you knocked me out, fired again to simulate the shot that killed Morgan, and ran, to return in a few minutes at a normal walk and be 'surprised' at what had happened. I suppose you'd have called the building watchman to arrest me, only it happened that I had come with a detective, who could do the job much better."

Montgomery's face was still suffused and angry. But he did show enough doubt, now, to say: "Then there ought to be a second bullet around here, if two shots were fired."

Cunningham was waiting for that. It was the first break in the entire game that had come his way.

"There is," he said. "I spotted it several minutes ago. Up there."

He pointed. Up above the window, in the angle between moulding and ceiling, was a jagged hole. Undoubtedly a bullet hole, and undoubtedly not [redacted] slug that had passed through the dead man's head first. The angle was impossible for that.

Montgomery's face grew less choleric, and more coldly shrewd.

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He stared at Cunningham and then at Geeza, and said nothing.

Geeza's lips curled. "If it weren't in the presence of a dead man, I'd laugh, my friend. All you've been saying is a fantastic fairy tale. It's so far-fetched that I'm not even angry. I killed Curtiss? Prove it! I hired two gunmen to do away with Miss Curtiss in such a manner as to make the police think she had run away because she was a murderess? Find the two gunmen! I shot Morgan, here? Don't be ridiculous!"

"There are the stolen securities in Curtiss' box," snapped Cunningham. "You can't deny you bought them, at a big discount, and put them out of circulation down there."

"I can and do deny it, young man. If those securities are stolen, all I can say is that I bought them in good faith and have been myself victimized. And try to prove otherwise!"

CUNNINGHAM stared deep into the lawyer's eyes. They were as bleak and unyielding as ice.

"You haven't one shred of evidence on which to base this absurd charge," Geeza said evenly. "Miss Curtiss killed her uncle, you killed Spencer Morgan—for what reason I know not. That's all there is to it."

There was a thick silence in the office. Down in the street, with the blizzard over, the evening traffic noises came up muted by snow.

Cunningham stared at Geeza, and then at Montgomery. In the city detective's eyes he read that he had lost—that he was to be hauled in for murder.

He looked at the body of the murdered man, grotesquely slumped in the chair beside his desk. And then his eyes became twin flames that ate first at Geeza's cold face and then at Montgomery's ax-blade countenance.

"But I have proof," he said slowly, voice vibrant. "At least, it's a hundred to one I can produce it." He looked at Montgomery. "What would you think if I could make that dead man speak—convict this oily killer with his own lips?"

Montgomery only stared. Geeza snapped: "Don't be more insane than you already have been."

Cunningham smiled.

"Montgomery, if somebody came at you with a gun—somebody you knew—what would probably be your last word on earth?"

"'Nuts,' I guess. Or 'Hey!'" said Montgomery, face expressing bewilderment and recurring anger.

"Oh, no," said Cunningham. "It's a hundred to one your last word would be—the name of the man about to kill you. It's a psychological fact much made use of in wilder parts of the world where law courts are unknown."

"I don't get you," said Montgomery. Geeza said nothing. His eyes were suddenly harder yet, and fixed in breathless intensity on Cunningham's face.

"A man dies with his killer's name as his last word. That man's vocal cords set in death in that final pattern. You see? Now, if the normal air for a spoken word were supplied the murdered man, the final word would be uttered again."

Montgomery's jaws hung slack. Geeza started angrily.

"You're crazy!" he almost shouted. "I never heard of such a thing!"

"Read Benson on little known facts about Korean justice," retorted Cunningham. He turned to Montgomery again. "What would you think if this corpse could be made to speak?"

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MONTGOMERY'S forehead wrinkled. "It don't sound at all possible. In fact, it sounds screwy as hell. But if it did—"

Cunningham nodded triumphantly.

"If it did, it would convict a murderer out of the mouth of death itself. So—let's try it. Let's supply the dead man with breath to repeat his dying word. You know how to produce artificial respiration, Montgomery?"

"Yeah . . ."

"Well, produce it in Spencer Morgan. And we'll hope to God his last word *wasn't* 'nuts,' or 'hey!'"

Geeza wiped great drops of sweat from a suddenly dewed forehead.

"You can't touch that body! It must be left till the coroner gets here!"

"There are times," said Cunningham softly, "when rules must be broken. Go ahead, Montgomery."

"This is mad—a ghastly joke! I will not permit—"

"You're not afraid to hear the dead man's last word in life, are you, Geeza?" Cunningham cut in icily.

"Certainly not. Only it is utterly impossible that such a thing as you describe can be made to happen—"

"Let's see. It won't hurt to find out. Arms up, Montgomery, then let them down slowly."

Montgomery chewed at his lip. Then his hands went out reluctantly. He grasped the dead man's wrists. "Ought to be laid on the floor, but I guess I can get air into his lungs while he's sitting on the chair," he muttered.

Slowly he raised the dead man's arms, and slowly lowered them again.

No sound came from the dead lips.

Geeza drew a great sigh, and laughed. The laugh was a bit shaky. "You see? In spite of Benson's 'little known facts about Korean justice,' the dead don't talk. Although, as far as I'm concerned, they could speak volumes—"

"The tongue!" exlaimed Cunningham. "Of course! The tongue!"

"What?" said Montgomery, irascibly.

"The dead man swallowed his tongue, just as a drowned person does. Raise his arms with one hand, and hold his tongue up out of his throat with the other."

"I'll be damned if I—" rasped Montgomery. Then he bit his lip and opened the dead man's jaws.

He raised the arms again, let them down slowly.

And sound came from the lips of the corpse!

That sound brought a curse from Montgomery's hard mouth—drew a cry as brittle as breaking glass from the criminal lawyer. It seemed to resound in the office like a curse.

"Ge-e-e-eza-a-a—"

"My soul," breathed Montgomery.

Then he plunged toward the door in a flying tackle and got the screaming, gray-faced lawyer before he could escape to the corridor.

MONTGOMERY faced Cunningham and Corlene Curtiss in his office at headquarters. It was one in the morning.

"Geeza confessed," he said shortly, keeping his gaze from Cunningham's face. "That yarn you spun in your office was over half true, at that. Yet I'll swear you were bluffing—"

"Sure I was bluffing," said Curtiss, tightening the arm which was around Corlene's shoulders. "But it made a swell story, didn't it?"

Montgomery grunted. "He confessed to Curtiss' murder too. Couldn't get electrocuted any harder for two murders than for one." His eyes finally

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went to Cunningham's, with grudging admiration in them. "That talking corpse stunt was pretty slick. I'll admit it even had me going, till I took time out to really think it over."

Cunningham grinned. "Then you realized, of course, that even though a dead man's vocal cords can be made to emit sound—which they can—it would be impossible for dead tongue and palate to pronounce the g and z in a name like Geeza. But luckily Geeza was too rattled to realize that. And he didn't know that there never was a writer named Benson who wrote concerning 'little known facts about Korean justice.' So he stands accused—by a dead man."

"But how did it seem to talk, then?" frowned Montgomery.

Cunningham grinned again. "You called me a three-a-day wizard, a vaudeville magician. Okay, I used to be. And any stage magician must be able to indulge in a bit of ventriloquism when he needs to. So long, Montgomery. Don't take any pewter nickels."

CIPHER SOLVERS' CLUB FOR SEPTEMBER

Your name appears in the following list if you sent us one or more answers to puzzles Nos. 211-34, inclusive, published in our cipher department during September. The monthly total was 4,905 answers, raising our grand total for the year to 53,620 answers! The degree sign (°) is used to indicate members of our °Inner Circle Club, who have individual records of 1,000 or more solutions. Our Cipher Solvers' Club for October will appear in an early issue. Watch for it, cryptofans, and keep your answers coming!

Twenty-four Answers—K. Aaba, Crowland, Ontario, Canada; Aachen, Hollywood, Calif.; Jay Abey, Los Angeles, Calif.; I'mbak Agen, Bay Shore, N. Y.; Amanovlettus, Franklin, N. H.; Anodakadona, Fargo, N. Dak.; Attempt (10th-13th), Akron, Ohio; Baab, Montreal, Quebec, Canada; °Herbert E. Batho, Avalon, Calif.; °See Bee Bee, Hamilton, Kans.; A Has-Been, Union Grove, Wis.; Ben Brownie, New York, N. Y.; °Mrs. C. G. Burroughs, Madison, Wis.; Mabel B. Canon, Philadelphia, Pa.; °H Le Care, Norfolk, Va.; °Blue Hen Chick, Middletown, Del.; °Ciphermit, Houlton, Me.; Judson H. Clark, Elmira, N. Y.; °Comrade, Baltimore, Md.; °Joseph E. Conklin, Riverhead, N. Y.; Jos. M. Crosby, Hayes Center, Nebr.; Cryptanalyst, Clinton, Iowa; °W. E. Dalton, Marion, Ind.; Dogmaamgod, Massillon, Ohio; °Edward J. Drumn, Eagle Rock, Calif.; °M. E., Scranton, Pa.; °Edmaca, Albany, N. Y.; °Arty Ess, Scranton, Pa.; Ezymarc, Franklin, N. H.; The Evans Family, Brooklyn, N. Y.; Farad, San Francisco, Calif.; °C. F., Baltimore, Md.; °G. Fulton, Cleveland, Ohio; Michael G. H. Gelsinger, Buffalo, N. Y.; The Griffin, Swansea, Mass.; Makem Harder, Berkeley, Calif.; Dr. S. F. Hedgcock, Glencoe, Ill.; Helen, Boonton, N. J.; Hitch, Boonton, N. J.; Holly, Dallas, Pa.; °G. M. Howe, Allston, Mass.; Mrs. Opal Hurt, Albert Lea, Minn.; Alter Idem, Welland, Ontario, Canada; Jaefsee, Accord, N. Y.; °Jayel, Canton, Ohio; Mrs. Lynn Kaiser, Biloxi, Miss.; Kate, Crowley, La.; Ker, Saginaw, Mich.; Doc K, Cicero, Ill.; Edward L. Kowalski, Chicago, Ill.; Marie Kristjansson, Brooklyn, N. Y.; J. C. K., Gary, Ind.; Lethargic, Los Angeles, Calif.; °E. H. Loyd, Jr., Chicago, Ill.; Mrs. Bertha Luckmun, Ocheyedan, Iowa; °Nice, A. M., Indianapolis, Ind.; °Magi, Chicago, Ill.; Mahdi, Merrillan, Wis.; Troy Matthews, Los Angeles, Calif.; Del J. McLane, East Liverpool, Ohio; °A. Meredith, Pittsburgh, Pa.; Minerva, Marion, Ind.; Betty Murray, San Francisco, Calif.; Nedyah, New York, N. Y.; °M. O., Bronx, N. Y.; Owleyes, Brandon, Vt.; °Mrs. Anna M. Page, Shelburne Falls, Mass.; Phoney, San Pedro, Calif.; Piscator, Middletown, N. Y.; °W. F. Plette, Galesburg, Ill.; Porthos, Fall River, Mass.; °Primrose, Baltimore, Md.; Qpkwins, Roxbury, Mass.; Isabel Revord, Hartford, Conn.; Charles L. Rohde, Baltimore, Md.; °Romeo, Waynesboro, Pa.; Mrs. H. A. Seals, Cleveland, Ohio; Kay Vee See, Seattle, Wash.; °O. I. See, Caroleen, N. C.; Sherlac, Philadelphia, Pa.; °Sleepy, Bryn Mawr, Pa.; °A. W. Smith, Oklahoma City, Okla.; °Nick Spar, Lynchburg, Va.; Speck, Little Rock, Ark.; Sam Spiegel, Butte, Mont.; °Jack-Stay, Tucson, Ariz.; °Dick Tate, Battle Creek, Mich.; °Old Timer, Guthrie, Okla.; °F. E. Tinkham, Ripon, Wis.; Trams, South Bend, Ind.; Paw Tucket, Orlando, Fla.; Uuem, Dayton, Ohio; R. W. West, Passaic, N. J.; °H. F. Wickner, Las Vegas, Nev.; Little Willy, Johnston, Pa.; °E. A. Wilson, Oakdale, Pa.; Sam Wilson, Chicago, Ill.; I. Workem, Spearfish, S. Dak.; °Doctor X, Kansas City, Mo.; Lew Zirn, Wilkes-Barre, Pa.; °A. R. Zorn, Perris, Calif.

(*Continued on Page* 96)

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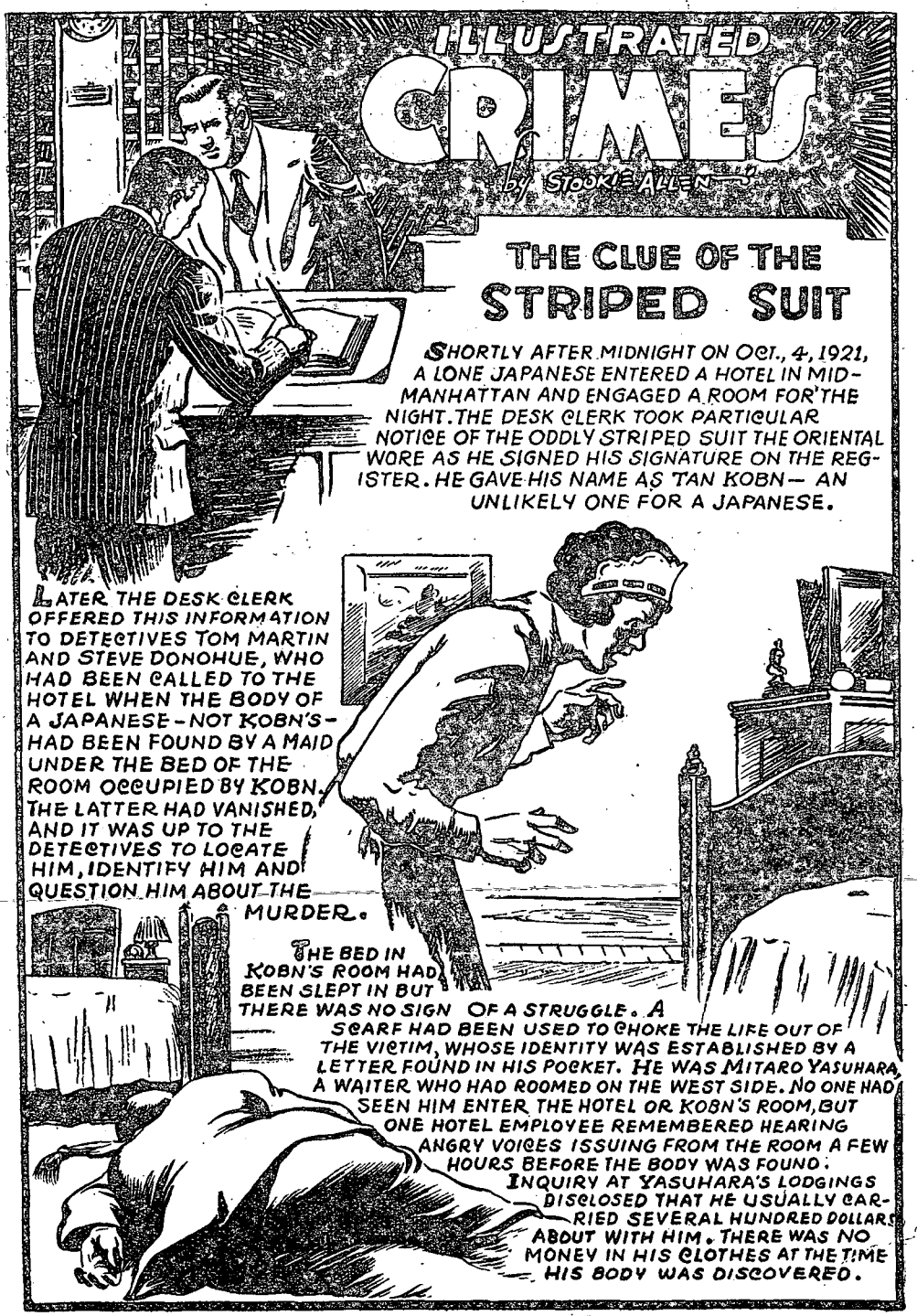
ILLUSTRATED
CRIMES
by STOOKIE ALLEN
THE CLUE OF THE STRIPED SUIT
SHORTLY AFTER MIDNIGHT ON OCT., 4, 1921, A LONE JAPANESE ENTERED A HOTEL IN MID-MANHATTAN AND ENGAGED A ROOM FOR THE NIGHT. THE DESK CLERK TOOK PARTICULAR NOTICE OF THE ODDLY STRIPED SUIT THE ORIENTAL WORE AS HE SIGNED HIS SIGNATURE ON THE REGISTER. HE GAVE HIS NAME AS TAN KOBN— AN UNLIKELY ONE FOR A JAPANESE.
LATER THE DESK CLERK OFFERED THIS INFORMATION TO DETECTIVES TOM MARTIN AND STEVE DONOHUE, WHO HAD BEEN CALLED TO THE HOTEL WHEN THE BODY OF A JAPANESE - NOT KOBN'S - HAD BEEN FOUND BY A MAID UNDER THE BED OF THE ROOM OCCUPIED BY KOBN. THE LATTER HAD VANISHED, AND IT WAS UP TO THE DETECTIVES TO LOCATE HIM, IDENTIFY HIM AND QUESTION HIM ABOUT THE MURDER.
THE BED IN KOBN'S ROOM HAD BEEN SLEPT IN BUT THERE WAS NO SIGN OF A STRUGGLE. A SCARF HAD BEEN USED TO CHOKE THE LIFE OUT OF THE VICTIM, WHOSE IDENTITY WAS ESTABLISHED BY A LETTER FOUND IN HIS POCKET. HE WAS MITARO YASUHARA, A WAITER WHO HAD ROOMED ON THE WEST SIDE. NO ONE HAD SEEN HIM ENTER THE HOTEL OR KOBN'S ROOM, BUT ONE HOTEL EMPLOYEE REMEMBERED HEARING ANGRY VOICES ISSUING FROM THE ROOM A FEW HOURS BEFORE THE BODY WAS FOUND. INQUIRY AT YASUHARA'S LODGINGS DISCLOSED THAT HE USUALLY CARRIED SEVERAL HUNDRED DOLLARS ABOUT WITH HIM. THERE WAS NO MONEY IN HIS CLOTHES AT THE TIME HIS BODY WAS DISCOVERED.

COMING SOON—

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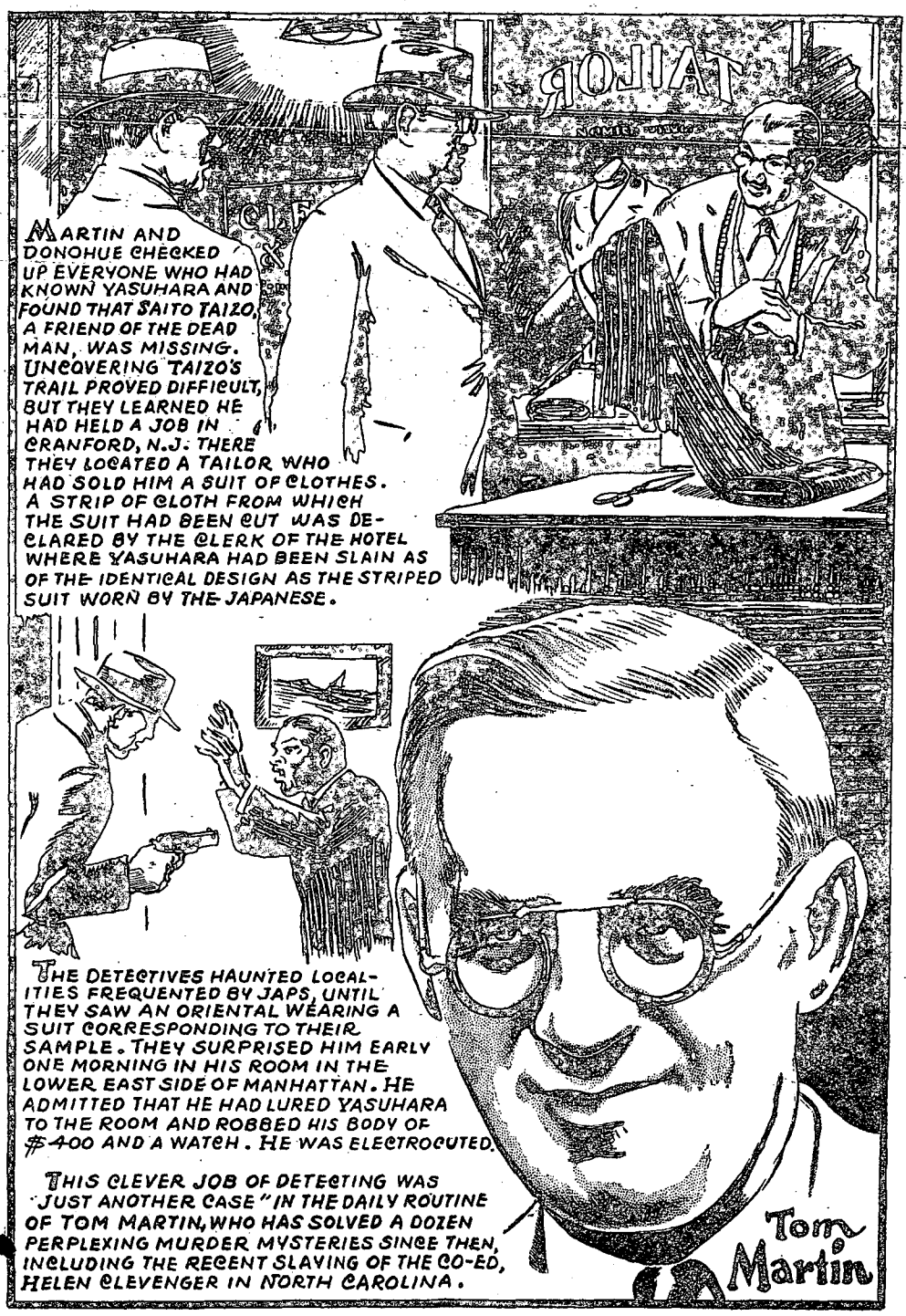
TAILOR
MARTIN AND DONOHUE CHECKED UP EVERYONE WHO HAD KNOWN YASUHARA AND FOUND THAT SAITO TAIZO, A FRIEND OF THE DEAD MAN, WAS MISSING. UNCOVERING TAIZO'S TRAIL PROVED DIFFICULT, BUT THEY LEARNED HE HAD HELD A JOB IN CRANFORD, N.J. THERE THEY LOCATED A TAILOR WHO HAD SOLD HIM A SUIT OF CLOTHES. A STRIP OF CLOTH FROM WHICH THE SUIT HAD BEEN CUT WAS DECLARED BY THE CLERK OF THE HOTEL WHERE YASUHARA HAD BEEN SLAIN AS OF THE IDENTICAL DESIGN AS THE STRIPED SUIT WORN BY THE JAPANESE.
THE DETECTIVES HAUNTED LOCALITIES FREQUENTED BY JAPS, UNTIL THEY SAW AN ORIENTAL WEARING A SUIT CORRESPONDING TO THEIR SAMPLE. THEY SURPRISED HIM EARLY ONE MORNING IN HIS ROOM IN THE LOWER EAST SIDE OF MANHATTAN. HE ADMITTED THAT HE HAD LURED YASUHARA TO THE ROOM AND ROBBED HIS BODY OF $400 AND A WATCH. HE WAS ELECTROCUTED.
THIS CLEVER JOB OF DETECTING WAS "JUST ANOTHER CASE" IN THE DAILY ROUTINE OF TOM MARTIN, WHO HAS SOLVED A DOZEN PERPLEXING MURDER MYSTERIES SINCE THEN, INCLUDING THE RECENT SLAYING OF THE CO-ED, HELEN CLEVENGER IN NORTH CAROLINA.
Tom Martin

THE PURLOINED POISON

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"We're going after big stuff. We're going to take a bank!"

Female Fagin

By Dugal O'Liam

A SQUARE-JAWED woman with steel-gray eyes and the hands of an industrious farmer stood in the center of a poorly furnished room in a Missouri mountain home and swung an evil looking blacksnake whip about her head.

The Greatest Outlaws of Modern Times Came to "Ma" Barker to Pay Her Homage — because She Had Forgotten More Tricks Than They Would Ever Master

Four boys stood at respectful distances. Three of them resembled her. The other was wan, solemn and thoughtful. She snapped the blacksnake whip under his pale chin, the tongue cracking like a light revolver. The youth blinked and drew back, fear in his brooding eyes.

"You, Fred," the woman snarled, "act like a sissy. I don't want any sissies in my family. I'll skin you alive, if you don't show some gumption. If I ever see you turn pale, when you see blood again, I'll beat you to within an inch of your life. I tell you, you kids have got to be hard. Do you understand? Hard! Hard!

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HARD! You've got to learn to like blood, to revel in it, to drink it, like you would wine because that's all the wine you'll get."

She turned and snapped the whip at the second youth, a thick set, square-jawed boy of perhaps twenty. He had gray eyes like his mother, gray eyes and hard mouth with big hands and lines already showing in his prematurely aged face. The whip snapped fairly in his face and he never batted an eye. The woman scowled at him and curled her lip wickedly, as if his lack of fear angered her.

"Oh, you got guts all right, Arthur," she spat. "You're not afraid. I give you credit for that. Nothing scares you. But I tell you, you're too dumb to be a good crook. Maybe if you had a few more jumps in your system you'd be a better man. The way it is, you blunder along, afraid of nothing, and get yourself into trouble. I don't want that. Understand? I want you to pull your jobs and make clean breaks.

"I don't want you to take any chances you don't have to take. The first one of you that gets caught in a job gets the hide skinned off him. What the law will do to you ain't the half of what I'll do to you when the law gets through with you. See?"

Arthur said nothing, standing his ground. He scowled back at the woman and his evil face was heavy with hatred. She turned suddenly from him and swished the whip around her head again. This time it cracked under the nose of another square jawed one, not so burly as Arthur, a bit taller, but with the same square jaw and cold gray eyes, the same unflinching willingness to dare the darting whip.

"All right, Lloyd," the woman growled, "you heard what I told your brothers. And you, too, Herman." She cracked the whip under the nose of the fourth youth, a little younger, probably, than Arthur. He, too, took it without flinching. The woman went on, clipping her words spitefully.

"We're getting ready for some real stuff now," she said. "We're through with filling station stickups and petty thievery. We're going after big stuff! We're going to take a bank some time this week! It's up to you four to do the work and I want you to be ready. I don't want any lame ducks and I want you to know what to do when the time comes."

"Whattaya mean, ma, we gotta know what to do?" the one called Arthur demanded. "What's any different about a bank than a filling station or anything else? Shucks, it's all the same. Keep your nerve and shoot first if there's to be any shooting."

THE woman lashed at him with the whip. Arthur ducked and grinned mockingly. "That's just like you, you dunderhead," the woman snapped. "Didn't I just tell you you were too dumb to be any good? I suppose you'd go right in and stick up any old bank, any time of day, without casing it or anything."

"All banks have money and they all keep it in about the same places," Arthur argued, stubbornly.

"Shut up and let Ma finish," growled Lloyd.

"Listen, all of you," the woman continued. "You must always get your banks cased right. To begin with, look for a balcony as soon as you go into a bank. If there's a balcony, get out. Don't have anything to do with it. Hunt yourself another bank. Balconies are bad stuff. They keep machine guns and all sorts of crack shots on

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those balconies and they always have lookouts there.

"And don't think just because you can't see anyone on a balcony, they ain't there. That's the trick. They build 'em so you can't see anyone. But you just haul out a gun and go to work and you'll be mowed down so fast you won't know what happened. So remember that. As soon as you start casing a bank, look for a balcony. It may be in the back, it may be in the front, over the entrance, it may be on the side. But wherever it is, shun it like a pestilence."

"Okay, Ma," Herman spoke up. "Now if there ain't any balocony. What's next?"

"Make a little deposit and talk as much as you can about how solid the bank is. Get a statement if you can, too. See what the assets are and how much is in cash deposits, and negotiable stuff if you can. Stay away from bonds and that sort of thing. Too dangerous. Watch out for cash. Try to get into the bank around nine o'clock, opening time. They'll be hauling out the money then. It'll give you a good idea of the shortest way to the vaults. You can get a look, too, at the cash partitions in the vaults and maybe at how much cash each teller has in his booth. Remember that.

"If there isn't a lot of dough in the bank, skip it. Heisting a bank's too much of a risk to go for a bum one. Be sure to make it worth your while and always try to get one with a back door if you can, so you can make a getaway if anything happens up front. Be sure and have that back door watched as well as the front. And keep your guns down when you're working so passers-by won't get a look at them and turn in a squawk."

She paused and looked over her class. They looked back at her, eager for new words.

"How do you go in when the job comes up, Ma?" It was Fred, the thin one, speaking, his voice trembling.

"Walk in like you had business there. Never go in more than two at a time. Make it one if you can. And don't get too many in on it. The four of you, with one good helper, should be able to do the job. Keep one man in the car with the motor running. Don't ever let it stop, but don't have it running fast. Just idling, so no one will notice it's running. And be sure not to get a rich mixture in your carburetor so there'll be a lot of smoke billowing out to attract attention.

"And don't all drive up in front of the place in the car. Get out and walk down. Let one go up in the car and the others come in from different directions, kind of casual like. Try and hit the place at the hour when there isn't much business. Don't take lunch time, because you want to be sure how many people are in the bank and that you account for all of them when you go in. I mean the workers there. Don't ever start a job unless absolutely everyone is accounted for. You want to be sure and find out when you're casing the bank how many work there and then see to it that they're all in sight when you put on the stick up.

"As soon as you do that, you can go to work. Remember now, not more than two go into the place at one time and don't all hit the door at once. Then as soon as you go to work, get someone on the back door, if there is a back door, and someone on the front door. Don't keep anyone out. If a customer comes in, all right. Let him in. But put him on the floor, face down.

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"Get all the employees down on the floor, too. Get them on their bellies with their hands out in front of them, too. See that their faces are turned away from the windows so they can't be giving any signals. Then scoop up the money as fast as you can. Take bills whenever possible because it's easier to carry. Silver's heavy and makes a noise.

"And don't be greedy. Don't insist on cleaning everything out unless it's handy. Don't wait around for a few hundred measly dollars and get caught. You have to work fast. If you take more than ten minutes for the whole job, the chances are you'll be grabbed. And if anyone starts to buck, don't hesitate to shoot.

"Keep your silencers on your guns and when you shoot, make it final. Don't leave any hollering and shouting wounded around. And be careful of women. They are liable to scream. If they faint, gag them quick for they'll start yelling as soon as they come around and there'll be hell to pay."

She stopped suddenly, cracked the whip again and put her big hands on her hips. "Now, did you get what I said?"

They said, "Yeh, Ma," in chorus and Arthur grinned happily and said, "When do we start?"

THIS, then, is the true story of the most amazing crime school in American history. Not even the pen of Dickens could picture anything as fiercely criminal as this woman, Katharine (Ma) Barker. At one time she was a church worker, a devoted wife to a struggling Ozark Mountain farmer, mother of four sons reared in country Sunday school atmosphere who were now her prize students in her school of viciousness and violence.

It hadn't been so many years since she had been a sincere church worker. She taught a class in the country church, worked night and day to help the sick and the improvident, was a good woman in the Ozark hills where she lived with Farmer Barker and her family.

One day Arthur came home troubled. He had gone with another boy to a farmyard and stolen some fruit. The other boy had taken a small hunting rifle belonging to the farmer. Arthur had refused to have anything to do with this theft. At least he told his mother he had. The other boy took the gun and ran home with it.

Now the farmer never had objected to the fruit stealing. He had much fruit and expected the children to make occasional raids. But the gun was something else. He notified the town constabulary. They began a hunt. They found the gun and the other youth, son of a wealthy merchant in the little town, told the officers that Arthur Barker had stolen it and that he, afraid, had made Arthur give it up.

"Then I got scared and didn't know what to do with it," he said.

Arthur Barker was arrested. He told his story. He had had nothing to do with the theft of the gun. He'd taken the fruit, he admitted, but had protested against taking the gun. He confronted the merchant's son and told his story. The merchant's son called him a liar, but Arthur stuck to his story.

They went to court. The judge sent Arthur Barker to a reformatory. The wealthy merchant's son was allowed to go home, unpunished.

Katharine Barker left that courtroom with bitterness and an insatiate craving for revenge in her heart. Revenge on all, on the rich and the poor,

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on law and all it represented. She went home to her husband and found him mortally ill from the shock of the blow. His son a convicted criminal, a rich man's son freed! Three weeks later, while Arthur was learning the ropes in the reformatory, his father died. "Of a broken heart," Katharine Barker said.

SHE didn't teach in the Sunday school any more. But she never missed a service. People wouldn't want a woman who had a son in reform school to teach their children about God, she told herself. But they couldn't keep her away from the church. She went as always, prayed faithfully, helped where she was asked to help and left the church with a load in her heart as vengeful as ever.

She waited until Arthur left the reform school. He came home, hard faced and ugly mannered. The imprint of a criminal was on him even then. He had been home one hour when she summoned the three brothers. This is the speech she made to them that day in the little farm kitchen.

"Doc" (Arthur was always called Doc) "had to go to reform school because we're poor. The one that did the stealing was rich, so he didn't have to go. The only way we can keep from having things like that done to us is to get plenty of money. If you have money, you can do anything. And there's only one way for us to get money. Do you know what that way is?"

Doc knew. He answered harshly, no fear of his mother or the law or anything else in his rasping voice.

"Yeah—steal it," he said.

His three brothers gasped and stared at him. But not Ma.

"Exactly," she said. "We'll have to steal it and we don't care how we steal it. You four are going to be the most desperate and successful criminals in the world. You're going to be rich. You're going to rob banks, kidnap rich men, do anything to get money. You're going to bring men here you can trust and who can work with you. This house is open to any man with guts enough to take what he wants. I don't care how bad he is. I want him. I can handle him.

"Before you walk you have to creep. We'll start on small jobs—filling stations and small stores and things like that. We'll get around to banks and theaters and that sort of game later. Then we'll get into the kidnaping game, too. But there is one thing you have to remember. That is that there is to be no drinking and no women. You can't succeed and have liquor or women around. Let them strictly alone and we'll be rich and famous."

Fred, the youngest, was frightened. He was the brooding one of the four, much like his father, inclined to be gentle and introspective. He looked at his mother and his lip trembled. She saw it and reached for a blacksnake whip. She wrapped it around his bare legs fiercely. He paled, but his lip stopped trembling.

Then he said, "But you kept on going to Sunday school and church all the time you were fixing to do this."

"I certainly did," Ma Barker said, "and I intend to keep on going to Sunday school. It's a good blind. It helps cover up. I hate it, but I can use it."

II

KATE BARKER was not one to act without thorough preparation. She sent Fred and Herman out to obtain firearms. They had no

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money and Fred protested this lack. Ma Barker got out the blacksnake whip again. She cracked it over their backs.

"You get them guns," she said. "There's gun stores down in town, ain't there? You've got muscles and eyes and some few brains, ain't you? That's all you need. Go get them guns and don't come back here until you get them."

Fred and Herman went. But they had their instructions. They were to take a piece of fly paper and stick it on a rear window of the arms store, which, in their little town happened to be a general hardware store. When the paper was thoroughly stuck, they were to tap it with a heavy instrument, but gently.

"There won't be any noise of falling glass to attract some nosey guy's attention," Ma Barker pointed out. "The glass sticks to the paper and all you have to do is peel it off and there's a hole to reach through and unlatch the window so you can crawl in."

She had other instructions, too. They were to go into the store and buy a padlock. They were to ask for a padlock because she remembered that the locks were kept near the gun case. That way they could get a look at the supply of guns, could case the store so they wouldn't waste time prowling about once night had fallen, they'd cracked a window and gotten inside.

Fred and Herman went away. It was still daylight when they went out. They went directly to the store, bought the padlock and cased their job. Thirty minutes before midnight that night they were back in their own home. They had four revolvers, two of them automatics, and a hundred rounds of ammunition. The flypaper had worked perfectly, they hadn't seen a soul and there were arms for all.

All but Ma Barker. She didn't need arms. She was the brains. A pistol, she said, would be too much of a temptation for her. She might feel like using it on someone who really didn't rate being shot.

There was enough money in the house for additional ammunition. Ma Barker sent Arthur to buy more, then took the boys into the woods, up the mountains behind their home. But she didn't send Doc to the store from which the guns had been stolen. He rode to another town. Buying ammunition for the very type of guns that had been taken wouldn't be the sort of operation Ma Barker's school of crime recommended.

In the woods, Ma taught them all to shoot. She set up targets and criticized their aim, their draw, their ability to hide their arms quickly. She spent hours in criticism and instruction and finally she believed she had, after a month of patient work, turned out four of the finest shots in the criminal world. Her boys were able to go out and take care of themselves.

The night came when the boys were ready for their first job. It wasn't an ambitious thing, a grocery store in a town thirty miles away. They'd cased it thoroughly. Only the owner himself was in after supper hour. And he kept his week's receipts in the store until Saturday morning when he made his regular trip to the bank. Because it was the only grocery store in the vicinity and handled, besides groceries, a fair grade of moonshine whisky, the week's receipts were likely to be fairly large. The storekeeper had been known to bank as much as five hundred dollars on one Saturday morning. Friday night should be a proper time for a haul.

Fred drove the car for this job. Doc

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and Lloyd were to do the gunning and Herman was to act as the hump, or lookout. Ma Barker called the lookout a hump. A hump is the man who stands against the building, in such shadows as he can find for himself, hunched up so that his upturned coat collar conceals his face. Hence the term, the hump.

Doc and Lloyd got the money and they made a clean getaway, up to a certain point. They drove home by a circuitous route and deposited four hundred and sixty dollars in Ma's lap. She counted it and put it away. They'd need that for further operations. And she was the cashier and general manager. She wouldn't give her boys large sums of money so that they could go out chasing women and drinking moonshine liquor.

THE next day the Barkers were plotting their next job when a deputy sheriff and two men drove up to their house. One of the men was the storekeeper, the other was a stranger. Ma Barker met them at the door and invited them in. Doc started for the room where he kept his revolver. Ma looked at him and then at the blacksnake whip and Doc sat down. The deputy sheriff singled out Fred.

"Freddie," he said, "Mr. Lucas here tells me he saw you in a car down close to where a store was robbed last night. The store over to the Corners. You didn't happen to be there, did you, Freddie?"

Fred didn't have a chance to answer. His mother answered for him. "My God, yes, he was there," she said. "Down the road a little piece from the store. Don't tell me there was a robbery there, Sheriff."

"Sho' was," the deputy said. "Mr. Lucas here said he thought it was Freddie in the car there and Mr. Brookins here couldn't make out who stuck him up, but he said they took their handkerchiefs off their faces when they went out and they went toward where Mr. Lucus said he saw Freddie's car. I just thought maybe you'd seen them, Freddie."

Ma Barker suddenly began to weep, hysterically. She explained that she had Fred stop where he did—for a reason. But she hadn't known that there was any hold-up. Such a terrible thing. Did they get any money? And wasn't there some way to stop that sort of thing? She talked and wept and wept and talked. To think that her boys would be so close to anything so terrible.

The deputy was flustered and upset. Lucas and Brookins were desolated. They finally apologized, singly and collectively, for causing Ma Barker so much anxiety and withdrew. Ma Barker went to the front window and watched them drive away. When she came back to confront her four sons she had her inevitable blacksnake. Ten minutes later Lloyd and Doc were whimpering on the floor. Doc's face was gashed with a five inch cut where the blacksnake had struck.

"That's for damn near getting caught," rasped Ma Barker, "and for being dumb enough to run towards where Fred had the car instead of running the other way and letting him pick you up on the fly. If they'd been anything but the dumbest cops in the world on that job, we'd all be in the calaboose right now. Or on our way there."

THE Barkers moved down to Webb City after the grocery store job. They kept their Ozark hills farmhouse, intending to use it as a

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hideaway if necessity ever arose. But the pickings in the hills were too slim for a gang like Ma Barker's. They needed action and plenty of money and Webb City was a stepping stone.

In Webb City the fame of the Barkers began to spread. Over that mysterious grapevine which all criminals know so well went word of their operations and of Ma Barker's organization. Although the police never suspected the God-fearing woman who always sat in a front row at Sunday and mid-week devotionals with her four polite and courteous sons, the underworld knew that a figure to be reckoned with had risen in their circles.

It was a month after they moved to Webb City that the first outsider came into the gang. Doc brought him home. He was a wiry, sullen looking youth who gave his name as Volney Davis. With him Doc founded the Barker gang. That there were to be Dillingers and Floyds and Karpises and Nelsons later was a mere dream then, the dream of Ma Barker, if not of her less imaginative brood.

For all of Webb City's improvement over the mountains, it still wasn't enough for Ma Barker. She had acquired a new interest in Webb City. His name was Donahue and he lived in the Barker house and shared the responsibilities of keeping the rapidly growing gang in line. Out in the town he was regarded as one of the many roomers the Widow Barker kept as a means of livelihood, but he was more than that.

He had become Ma's lover.

Donahue didn't like the idea of moving to Tulsa. The Oklahoma outlaws were pretty competent themselves, he argued. They could take care of the hold-up and bank robbing business without outside aid, and probably would make a point of it, if their territorial rights were impinged upon. Or so Donohue argued and while he was arguing in this manner, a great light came to him.

Returning home one night somewhat late, he heard voices in Ma Barker's room. They were the voices of Lloyd and Doc and Davis and Ma. They seemed to be discussing a citizen named Sam Donahue. They didn't call him that. Rather they called him that blinkety blanked stool pigeon. But he knew whom they meant.

"You give us hell if we even want to look at a dame," Doc complained, "and then you take up with this bum. I tell you we gotta get rid of him and when we get rid of him, we gotta be sure he don't talk any."

Ma Barker was speaking next. "I agree with you," she said. "And also, I know there's only one kind of an ex-sweetheart that don't talk. Do you know what kind that is, Doc?"

"One with a large hole in the back of his skull, prob'ly," Volney Davis suggested.

"Right," said Ma Barker. "It discourages 'em."

Sam Donohue didn't wait for any more. He left the house at once and the next day the Barkers packed their goods and started for Tulsa, Oklahoma, where oil money flowed madly and there were banks full of gold and green money and wealthy complacence. Also there were rich night clubs and country clubs and bootleggers to be shaken down and wild young rakes to be kidnaped and held for ransom. Oh, Tulsa was a fertile field for Ma Barker and her organization.

The Barkers prospered in Tulsa. Small town banks in the Tulsa area began to be visited at unexpected hours by from four to six men wearing black

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masks over the lower part of their faces who demanded cash in exchange for sparing the lives of those about them. Half a dozen banks in towns of from four to twenty-thousand population felt the heavy reactions of this well organized mob within a period of two years after the Barkers arrived in Tulsa in 1921.

DOWN in the Tulsa country there is an unwavering conviction that all outlaws hide in hills. It was the fashion set by such experts in the hold-up business and in general outlawry as Jack Dalton, Bad Bill Dillon, the reformed Al Jennings, Henry Starr and their school. At any rate, those hired to preserve the peace refused to believe otherwise and because of this fixation, the operations of the Barkers were greatly simplified.

Instead of fleeing to the hills, where every constable and sheriff in the aforementioned circle would be searching for them, the Barkers drove casually back to Tulsa and went to the Barker home on the Southeast side. They lived in a well-built, ample house that once had belonged to a newly rich oil operator who had since parted with his money and was glad to salvage something from the equity.

Also, they drove excellent automobiles and dressed carefully. They did not affect loud clothing and they likewise avoided bright looking automobiles. Conservative suiting and haberdashery and black cars of the conventional sedan type appealed to them more than something that could be spotted a dozen blocks off and would be noticed in any company.

Also, Ma Barker had seen to it that they used at least two cars when more than four of them went on a job. A sedan with four men in it is suspicious enough, no matter how conservative it all may look, she argued. A sedan with more than four in it, seen anywhere right after a hold-up, would be sure to attract attention. So it was that there had to be at least two cars and generally she went along in one to add the tone of a middle aged respectability to the party.

It was at the Tulsa house that the Barker gang really began to grow. Along in 1928 Baby Face Nelson first put his foot across the Barker threshold and the following year the greatest outlaw of modern times drove up to the house in the middle of the night, aroused Ma Barker and announced that he'd come to sit at her feet and learn his profession from top to bottom.

"I'm Johnny Dillinger," the stranger said. "The boys have heard of me."

"So have I," said Ma Barker, "and you're a bad one to have around. Too wild and reckless. If you hook up with us, you've got to quiet down and do as I say or you'll land us all in the jug. What about it?"

"I came here to do just that," said the Indiana bad man and he meant it.

Just before Dillinger arrived on the scene, the Barkers met with a serious set back. Volney Davis and Doc Barker decided that money wasn't coming in fast enough and took it into their heads to defy Ma Barker. That is, they planned a job and said nothing to her about it. They decided to break a safe in a Tulsa real estate and insurance brokerage house and use the money they knew to be there for their own pleasures. They were a little sick of turning everything into Treasury Ma and being forced to take what she doled out.

Remembering Ma's teachings back in the Ozarks, Doc managed to enter the

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building safely and Volney, an expert finger rigger, opened the safe. There they scooped up something like eleven thousand dollars in large bills and negotiable securities (a Ma Barker taboo at all times) and were on their way out when a figure materialized in a side door and ordered them to throw up their hands.

Volney Davis complied, but Doc didn't. He whipped out his gun and shot the intruder dead. He was the night watchman for the block.

Volney Davis fled Tulsa immediately. Doc Barker broke faith with Ma once more. Instead of going to his home, where her reputation as a pious churchgoer (she had joined the richest of the town's Methodist churches immediately upon reaching Tulsa) would shield him, he fled the city. He went to the hills, up in the Osage country. Tulsa police and Osage county officers and officers from all about immediately deployed into the Osage country. Planes flew over the wooded hills, zooming low to search out hiding places.

They found Doc Barker. They didn't find Davis, but they got Barker and he was identified by witnesses who'd seen him fleeing the scene of the killing. They pinned the insurance murder on him and he went to the Oklahoma state penitentiary at McAlester with a life sentence to ponder.

Ma Barker took the only course a woman with her organization could. She said that her son had been a hard working, religious, upstanding boy, that he was good to her, a faithful churchgoer. She did not believe he had committed the crime, but if he had, she was certain he had gotten in with bad companions, or that he had taken to drinking the sort of moonshine liquor that abounded in Tulsa in those days.

"If he is guilty," Ma said, "he must be punished. All I can do is pray for him."

She left the court house weeping copiously. Herman, Lloyd and Fred supported her and Pretty Boy Floyd drove the car that took her home.

III

MA now began to understand that further operations by her gang in the Tulsa vicinity would be dangerous. They would have to rove afar. They planned to invade Kansas. She took her three sons and left Floyd and the Hamiltons, notorious Texas bad men, in the house. She gave explicit instructions that there were to be no women in the house.

"But you, Pretty," she said to Floyd, "will have to get into some of my clothes. I want neighbors to see me around and I want the rooms all lighted up at night, around bed time, so that it'll look like we're all here."

They drove into Kansas and followed the road to Newton, thirty miles north of Wichita, a railroad town and a principal division point for the Santa Fe. It is at Newton that the California trains cut off from the southern lines and begin their long pull up the Kansas shelf and much money and valuable freight passes through the town or changes shipping there.

Fred, who had become the ablest of the casers in the Barker gang, discovered that the Newton Ice and Cold Storage Company would receive several thousands of dollars on a certain night for servicing a string of refrigerator cars. The company would be paid in cash—too late to take the money to the bank. Because company officials did not want to draw attention to the presence of the money, they decided against any extra watchmen. Fred learned this

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when he got a job helping to service the refrigerator cars.

They had but one car for the job. Ma waited in it until she was sure the job was done. Then she took a cab back to her hotel and Fred replaced her at the wheel.

Herman and Lloyd came out with the loot. Herman insisted upon taking the wheel when Fred suggested that they return to Ma Barker, where they would be safe.

"Not for me," Herman said. "We'll run into Wichita, put up at the Lassen and send for her."

Herman turned the car's nose southward. The night air was exhilarating and the car was fairly new and sensitive. Herman felt good. Ten thousand dollars rested in his inside pockets. Life was worth living. It'd been a clean break and a clean getaway. Even if the watchman had had to be trussed up to keep him quiet.

Herman decided to sing. Ma Barker always had counselled Herman against singing. It attracted attention, especially his kind of singing. The more he sang, the faster he drove his car. Through the little town of Sedgwick the trio roared, Fred counselling caution, Lloyd agreeing with him.

"Ma'll skin you alive with that blacksnake when she finds out how fast you been driving," Fred told Herman.

"She won't find out if you don't squawk," Herman said, warily. "Geez, I'd rather face the bulls any time than Ma. Boy, what she'd do to me if I ever got caught on a job."

"Or me," said Lloyd.

"Me, too," Fred added.

"She wouldn't be so hard on you, kid," Herman said. "You're the favorite kid now. She says you use your noodle. But me? Boy, what she'd do to me!"

THERE was a sudden roar of pursuit from the rear. Three motorcycle lights broke through the darkness. Down the concrete highway thundered the three machines, two with sidecars, one single. Lloyd peered back through the darkness. The motorcycles hit the crest of a hill and were limned against the horizon.

"There's five of them there and there's a car behind them, too," Lloyd said. "I can hear it. Better cut it down quick."

Herman did cut it down. He knew the car couldn't escape the motorcycles. He stopped beside the road and leaped out. He whipped out his pistol, peered into the darkness back over the road. Fred and Lloyd lunged for him as the motorcycles clattered up and five uniformed men leaped to the ground, guns drawn.

"Geez, I can't face Ma after this," Herman half screamed. There was a roar and he slumped to the ground, a blue hole in the center of a seared rosette in his right temple. He had chosen death rather than face the wrath of Ma Barker.

Lloyd and Fred were handcuffed. "We gotta check you up," the sergeant in charge of the police detail said. "A man ain't blowing his brains out just because he's grabbed for speeding."

Lloyd and Fred went to Leavenworth Federal penitentiary when the government stepped in and charged them with robbing the United States mails. It seems that the Newton money had been government money, under postoffice supervision.

Ma Barker was alone now. Doc was in McAlester, Lloyd and Fred in Leavenworth, Herman was dead.

But she still had her gang. She went back to Tulsa and moved defiantly into the old home. She stayed there until

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Fred was released from Leavenworth and about her she gathered the most vicious band of criminals in modern American criminology—such men as Freddie Goetz, Pretty Boy Floyd, Harry Van Meter, the almost legendary Dillinger, Byron Bolton, Elmer Farmer, Russel Gibson, the Hamiltons, Baby Face Nelson.

One by one they found their way to the feet of this mistress of crime, abode there a few days, weeks or months, and then went out into their underworld again, wiser, more vicious, cannier than before. She gave them ideas, plotted their crimes, taught them how to evade the law, how to make their crimes pay and always she cautioned them against mixing crimes of violence with women and liquor. Had John Dillinger heeded Ma Barker he might be alive today, but Dillinger was headstrong and reckless and Ma Barker admitted that she was not saddened to see him leave her place, even though she did agree with him, as she agreed with all her students, to meet again when she had her boys back with her.

ULTIMATELY Ma Barker was given permission to see her son, Doc, in the McAlester penitentiary. She went to McAlester with a plan and a purpose. She told Doc her plan under the very eyes of two guards, told him to wait until Fred was out. She expected Fred's release within a few weeks. Lloyd, she said, would not be out for many years.

Fred came out a few weeks later. He brought home another student. The student's name was Karpis, Alvin Karpis. He was a tall, slim man with dark, curly hair. Fred called him "Old Creepy," because of his languorous movements and his slow, deliberate way of talking. Old Creepy gave the impression of endless amiability and absolute harmlessness, yet he developed under Ma Barker into the madman of the underworld, a vicious, bitter killer who never gave quarter—but always wanted it.

It wasn't long after Fred rejoined his mother and brought Karpis with him that Doc Barker left McAlester. He left in the midst of a prison riot, someone saw him leap into a car on the Oklahoma City highway and McAlester never saw him again. Nor did Tulsa see more of Ma Barker and her sons. They never went back to the Tulsa home, heading northward instead and establishing headquarters in Chicago.

There the old Barker gang rallied around. Doc Barker and Fred met John Dillinger. Karpis already knew Dillinger. They were old pals. Karpis knew Pretty Boy Floyd, too, and Van Meter and Nelson and Goetz. But Dillinger had to go. He was too hot even for Ma and her gang. She was willing to hide him for brief hours now and then, but to have him constantly around was suicide.

That contemptuous face and that drooping eyelid were too well marked in America for comfort.

Ensconced in Chicago, Ma Barker began laying plans for kidnaping operations. Now and then, she said, there could be a small time bank stick-up, but only for operating expenses. The big money was in kidnapings and before another year had passed she had planned and put through two—the kidnapping of William Hamm, millionaire St. Paul brewer and Henry Urschel, Oklahoma City oil millionaire.

The Hamm kidnaping never was solved. The Urschel job blew up in the faces of the actual operators, but they never caught Ma Barker. Two men and a woman went to prison for the

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Oklahoma City job, but Ma Barker wasn't taken. Nor was Doc or Fred, although both had gone to Oklahoma with her to direct it.

The Hamm kidnaping netted Ma Barker's gang a cool $100,000, gladly paid by the victim's father for his son's release. It was the biggest job the Barkers ever had pulled, but it wasn't the best paying. The mob had grown unwieldy and Ma saw the money split a dozen ways. Her cut and Fred's amounted to $25,000. She had insisted upon that. She allowed Doc to fare as best he could with the remaining $75,000. She was devoting all her time, now, to looking out for Fred's welfare.

WITHIN a year another St. Paul millionaire had been kidnaped. Edward G. Bremer, a bank president, was snatched from the side of his eight year old daughter and dropped utterly from sight. A week later his relatives paid $200,000 for his release. It was another week before they got him, weary and half dazed, to tell his story.

Ma Barker took her cut from the $200,000 and Fred's and quit Chicago. With her went Doc and Karpis and Karpis's father-in-law, Art Dunlop. They drove up into Wisconsin, seeking a hideaway. Dunlop became attentive to Ma Barker. He was a weak, cackling man, given to excessive drinking and much talking. In some manner he learned of the Karpis and Barker connection with the Bremer snatch. He saw it as a huge joke. He became drunk and talked loudly of what a smart trick it was to shake down the rich for that kind of money.

Near Webster, Wisconsin, Ma Barker called for a show-down. She sent Dunlop into a restaurant for a pack of cigarettes and called Karpis and her two sons to her. She pointed a significant finger at the retreating figure of Dunlop.

"That old fool's going to drink and cackle us into trouble," she said. "When we get to that woods up ahead, stop the car. Doc, the job's yours. Have your rod ready."

There was a stream running through the clump of woods. Fred Barker stopped the car. Karpis peered at the side of the road. "Say, that looks like deer tracks," he said. "Let's have a look, pop."

He got out of the car. Dunlop lurched out. Doc Barker followed. Dunlop looked blearily at the tracks, then laughed foolishly. Doc Barker confronted him, his gun in his hand.

"Listen," he hissed, "I'm going to give you something to laugh for."

Dunlop saw the gun and laughed again, more hilariously than before. He slapped at Doc Barker's arm, opened his mouth to roar once more. The bullet caught him in the roof of the mouth and he rolled down the rocky bank into the creek, blood streaming from his lips.

Ma Barker split her mob then. "I'm tired," she told Doc and Karpis. "I need some Florida sunshine. Besides, it's bad business to hang together this way. We'd better split for a year or so. I'll locate a place in Florida and you can come down for vacations. But we'd better cut up the gang for a while and wait until the country cools off."

Ma Barker went to Florida. She and Fred took a house in Miami. They remained there several months. Then Fred grew nervous and restive. They went to Oklawaha on Lake Weir. They took a house there, deep in the country. Fred settled to a life of hunting and fishing. He hired guides, paid them liberally, bought an expensive automobile, albeit a conservative one, and pro-

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vided himself with the best in the way of hunting equipment.

In the meantime, J. Edgar Hoover had broadcast an alarm for the Barkers and Karpis. Descriptions, taken from prison records, were minute. Dodgers carried photographs of Fred Barker, wanted for the Bremer kidnaping, showing a heart tattooed on his right arm.

Word reached Hoover's office that the Barkers were hiding out in Florida. He notified E. J. Connelly in the Cincinnati office to proceed at once, with a force of men, to Florida.

CONNELLY learned that the Barkers had been in Miami, but had left suddenly. At the El Commodoro Hotel, where Fred Barker had had a room, he learned that they had contacted a Carson Bradford, president of the Biscayne Kennel Club, a dog racing track. Bradford said he had rented a house near Miami to one T. S. Blackburn and his mother, but that they had abandoned the place after paying him a season's rent. This was one of Ma Barker's last moves to cover her trail.

Connelly learned from Bradford that Blackburn was an enthusiastic hunter. He also learned that the best hunting was in Ocala county, near Lake Weir. He went there and contacted every guide he could find. He told them his mission and gave them a description of Barker. He called special attention to the tattooed heart. He asked those guides he had been able to contact to spread the word.

Ten days later, in Jacksonville, Connelly received an anonymous telephone call. "I'm a guide at Lake Weir," the voice said. "I was hunting today with a man who lives in a house at the west end of the lake. He killed a deer and then rolled up his sleeves to skin it and there was a heart tattooed on his arm. He looks exactly like the pictures I've seen of this Fred Barker wanted in the Bremer kidnaping. And he's wanted for murder, too—"

"Yes, yes, I know all about that," Connelly said. "Now tell me the exact location of this house."

The voice gave the exact location. It also volunteered the information that the heart-marked hunter lived with his mother. That was all Connelly needed to know. He summoned his men from all Florida areas. By midnight his band was ready. At the break of dawn, they would move on the doomed house.

Dawn came and Connelly approached the house on Lake Weir. He deployed his men about the house. Then he approached and shouted an order for the occupants to surrender. There was a sleepy interval. Then a woman's face appeared at a window.

"What do you want?" demanded Ma Barker.

"I'm a federal agent; I want you to come out peacefully and identify yourselves," Connelly said.

"Just a minute," the woman said. She turned back from the window. There was an ominous stillness. Suddenly the face appeared at another window. A machine gun's muzzle was thrust out, a rat-a-tat-tat of machine-gun fire burst on the morning air. Connelly fled to the protection of surrounding trees.

"All right," he shouted to his men, "let 'em have it."

THE federal men opened fire. They used machine guns, too, as well as service pistols and rifles. They kept up an unceasing fire for four hours, alternating the fire with tear gas bombs. For four hours the occupants of the house answered their fire. The rattle of machine guns shattered the pastoral

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stillness of the little community. The federal men raked the house fore and aft, shattered all the windows. Still the defenders returned the fire.

Eleven o'clock came and the sun was mounting high in the heavens. There was a sudden cry from the house, then a measured stillness. The federal men held their fire.

They heard the sound of a woman's weeping. Then silence again and finally a single shot.

After that all was quiet. No more cries, no more shots, no more bitter curses came from the enfiladed house. Connelly waited five, ten, fifteen minutes. Then he summoned a Negro who worked as a cook in the house and who had been hiding behind a nearby tree during the four hours' siege. He sent the man toward the house with instructions to enter if not challenged.

The man came back slowly. "They's all dead," he said. "All both of 'em."

Connelly and his men went in. Fred Barker lay on his back on the floor, three bullet wounds in his head, twelve in his body.

Across his body, her face against his, her left arm under his head, lay Ma Barker.

There was a single bullet hole in her right temple, a 45-bullet hole, and loosely in her right hand hung a 45-caliber revolver.

The Karpis-Barker gang ended there and so did Ma Barker's crime school. Alvin Karpis and Doc Barker eluded the law for another few months, but ultimately they were taken and sent to prison—for ninety-nine years.

Dillinger, Floyd, Nelson, Van Meter, Herman Barker, Goetz, Gibson, Ma Barker, Fred Barker and finally Karpis and Doc, alumni all of Ma Barker's strangely Faginesque university, took their degrees and paid their debts to society.

CIPHER SOLVERS' CLUB FOR SEPTEMBER

(*Continued from Page 79*)

Twenty-three—Arulas, Los Angeles Calif.; R. L. Blaha, Newark, N. J.; Arthur J. Brooks, Sault Sainte Marie, Ontario, Canada; Gold Bug, Newburgh, N. Y.; Cucumber, Redondo Beach, Calif.; Lefty Did, New York, N. Y.; Jay Essee, Fort Benning, Ga.; Jonesibus, Austin, Tex.; Keystonian, New York, N. Y.; °Kismet, Corona, N. Y.; G. E. Long, Cripple Creek, Colo.; Leotta Lowery, New York, N. Y.; Bernard McGee, Bloomfield, N. J.; Hard Boiled One, San Francisco, Calif.; Nickel-Plate, Saranac Lake, N. Y.; Mrs. Bruce Richardson, Saginaw, Mich.; °Alice Routh, Oklahoma City, Okla.; Box Six, Lapeer, Mich.; °G. A. Slight, Newburgh, N. Y.; Mrs. Josephine Spalding, Arizona; Sunny, Chicago, Ill.; Clement E. Taylor, Oakland, Calif.; A. F. T., Sidney, Ohio; °W. R. W., Chicago, Ill.; Charles E. Zirbes, Clinton, Iowa.

Twenty-two—D. E. Boliver, Hedley, Tex.; Kenneth Currell, Johnstown, Pa.; J. B. Emerick, Fort Monroe, Va.; °Mrs. F. M. Ingalls, Glendale, Calif.; °Jayem, Bellingham, Wash.; Julia Kots, Bronx, N. Y.; Tau Pi, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Twenty-one—Harry R. Bell, Columbus, Ohio; Donald P. Crane, Quincy, Mass.; Leonard Price, New York, N. Y.; George Shakeshaft, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada; °Ike N. Wynne, Great Falls, Mont.

Twenty—Ernest G. Alstadt, Erie, Pa.; How Carso, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada; Sherlock Holmes II, Brooklyn, N. Y.; Neil Johnson, Manchester, Iowa; J. G. Meerdink, Jersey City, N. J.; °Sue de Nymme, Chicago, Ill.; B. P., Miami, Fla.; Flo Rogoway, San Diego, Calif.; David Seltzer, New York, N. Y.; D. G. S., Colusa, Calif.

Nineteen—Alpha Bet, Merchantville, N. J.; Mrs. Mary E. Davis, Fancy Prairie, Ill.; Jack De Soto, New York, N. Y.; H. L. Evans, New York, N. Y.; G. N. G., Key West, Fla.; L. S. H., Washington, D. C.; H. H., Coventry, Ohio; My Pal, Brooklyn, N. Y.; Cecil T. Partner, Kokomo, Ind.; E. Smith, New York, N. Y.

Eighteen—Arrowhead, Pawtucket, R. I.; W. R. G., Maywood, Ill.; V. Genevrier, Globe, Ariz.; °U. U. Jeff, Massillon, Ohio; Lucille Little, Chicago, Ill.; Sherry Magee, New York, N. Y.; Jerry Phelan, Bronx, N. Y.; Ray Rasmussen, Chicago, Ill.; °Hugh B. Rossell, Washington, D. C.; Tud Tarbet, Logan, Utah; Texocron, New York, N. Y.; John Toscano, Brooklyn, N. Y.; A. Traveller, Washington, D. C.; Phil Wilcox, Stockbridge, Mass.

Seventeen—Duke d'Ekud, Bronx, N. Y.; Mrs. Josephine Johnson, Pittsburg, Kans.; Mrs. Altie Mather, West Allis, Wis.; Rena Patton, Los Angeles, Calif.; Quay, Springfield, Ill.; "8-7," Los Angeles, Calif.

(*Continued Next Week*)

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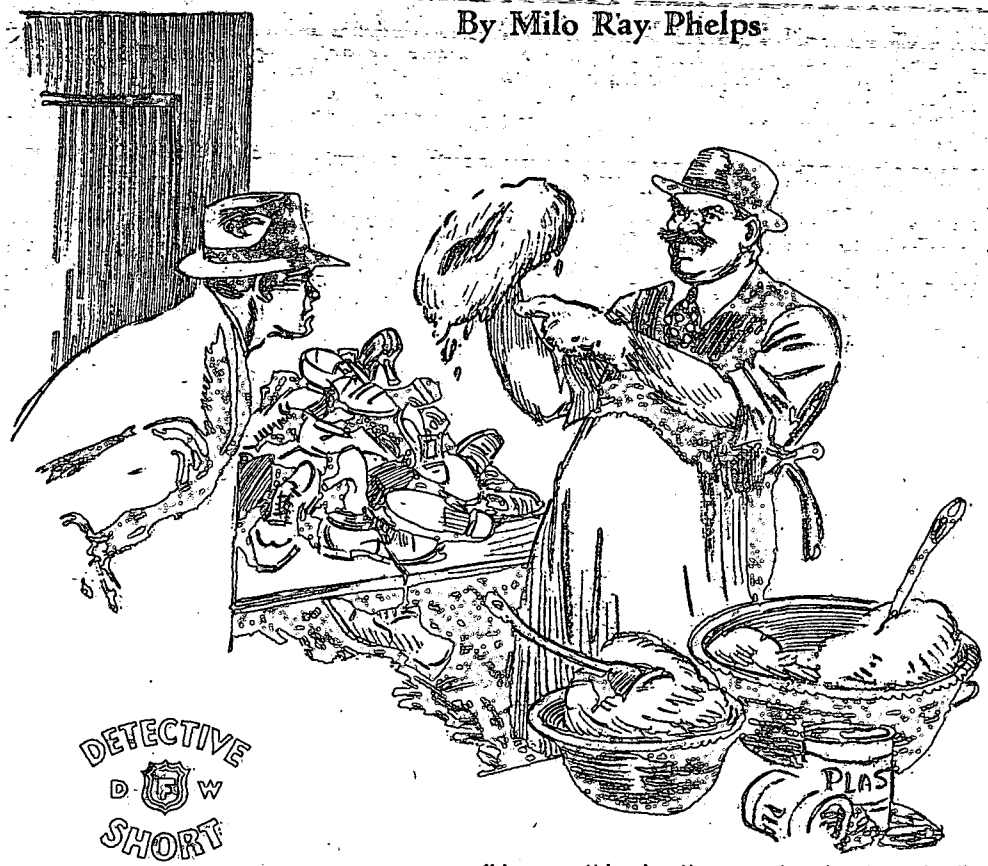
The Big Cast Mystery

By Milo Ray Phelps



DETECTIVE D W SHORT

"I say this is the murderer's footprint," Magimple affirms, "and the key to this whole business!"

THEY tell me every department has got one—some blunderin' blockhead with more luck than brains, I mean—but I'll back Murray Magimple against the field any day, and give you odds. The way this big balloon has risen to fame in the short time he's been on the force is a kick. I might even say, a kick in the pants—and my pants at that! Not only must I work with this guy, but he's moved in on me, and—well, take that affair last week. . . .

No Man Knows Whether Murray Magimple Relies on Science or Blind Luck—but Many a Man Suspects!

It's the openin' night of a big musical show entitled "The Isle of Hotcha," and me and Murray are occupyin' aisle seats, havin' been honored by the City Manager to pass judgment on the piece. All through the first act, the gags get thicker and the costumes

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thinner, and as the curtain glides down to thunderous applause from the gallery, I turns to Magimple. "Well, come on."

"Where to?" he grunts. "I'm comfortable."

"Why to call a riot squad," says I. "Have you forgot we're here to censor this?"

"But there's two more acts yet," he protests. "If we're gonna censure it, we oughta censure the whole thing, oughtn't we?"

My retort is blocked by the arrival of Dave Wenzel, the house manager.

"Well boys, how do you like it?" He leans in from the aisle.

"Great!" beams Magimple.

"Good." He leans closer. "Say, after the show, Sol Goodman, the show manager, is givin' a big party back stage. All the newspaper men will be there, and he wants you boys to come along. You know, to sorta meet the cast, and—"

"Sorry," I coughs. "We can't make it."

"Eh? Why not?" pops Magimple. "I'd enjoy meetin' some of that cast."

"Because we can't close up the man's show and then drink his liquor," I snaps.

"Close up the show!" echoes Wenzel. "Oh, see here now, Pepper, you can't be lookin' at this right."

But at this junction, we're interrupted by Goodman. He's a squat, worried little party with gold teeth and a bald pate, and he joins us all outa breath.

"That's all right. Let 'em close us," he pants. "Have 'em close us right now. You go announce it."

"What!" gapes Wenzel.

"Go announce it, I tell you!" He shoves him, protestin', down the aisle, and turns to us. "You gents is inspectors, ain't you? From headquarters?"

"Right," nods Magimple.

"Then follow me. We've had a—a accident."

Me and Murray rises in surprise and trails him back stage. We walk into a dead silence. A dozen wide-eyed chorus girls line the rail of the iron stairway leadin' to the dressin' rooms. With hushed whispers they fall in behind us, follow us down to a door marked with a large gilt star. Here stands Rex Mulford, the leadin' man, pale clear through his make-up, guardin' the door. Goodman braces himself; then pushes inside.

One look tells the story. Face upon the floor lies Lola Gay, star of the show, a dark purple stain spreadin' down her left side through the folds of her blue silk dressing gown.

"My gosh!" gulps Magimple.

"Yeah," chokes Goodman. "We ain't had nothin' but trouble since we left New York." He sags onto a gilt chair and mops his brow. "Her maid discovered her and come at once after me. She's just as we found her—we ain't touched a thing."

My mind leaps to that crowded auditorium. "What about that door we come through? Is that always guarded?"

"All durin' the show," he nods. "Nobody passed but me and the mail."

"Good." I'm relieved. "Empty the house and put some one you can trust on both doorways. None of your company is to leave. Do you understand?"

"Sure. I know." He rises wearily and shuffles out.

Grabbin' the phone, I wakes up headquarters; then turns to Murray: "Well, here's where you get to meet that cast after all."

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RECOVERIN' from his shock, he's pulled out one of his inevitable, black cigars, and now cocks his derby over one eye and blusters: "Yeah. But you can see it's a inside job, and I know these actors like a book. Have an answer for you in no time."

"I've heard that before," I sniffs, takin' in the room. "See anything of the weapon?"

"Not yet," he admits. "But it'll turn up."

"I've known 'em not to. May be under the body—won't know till the doc comes. What's out this window?"

I hooks a boudoir lamp and pokes it out the window to the end of the cord. This illumines a light well, walled on three sides by the theater buildin' and open on the alley. The bottom, formed by the roof of the first floor, is ten feet below the window, and covered with earth and a few neglected shrubs and grass blades.

"'Ah! A roof-garden," pipes Magimple, shoulderin' me aside. "There's probably footprints down there. Go call up our expert on the preservation of physical evidence, and—"

"'Aw, come down to earth," I growls. "'We got no such party, and you know it."

"'That's the trouble workin' with a dinky little department. No staff, no equipment." He throws up his hands in disgust and starts for the door. "'Very well, I'll do it myself."

That's Magimple—everything high-class and scientific. We don't do nothin' right around here.

"Nix!" I barks. "You stay right here till the wagon shows, while I see if I can get things lined up a little. When it's time for you to get scientific, I'll let you know."

He don't like that, and hands me a dark frown as I pass out the door. But I know what I'm doin'. This is a hot settin' for a murder investigation, and it's gonna be a problem keepin' order. It's no time for Murray to go off on one of them tangents of his.

I find Goodman and Wenzel guardin' the doors, beatin' off the newspaper men. These guys claim they was invited to a party, and try and keep 'em out. The show people are pretty well outa sight. This is a double blow to them, I discover, because it probably means the end of the tour. It seems the show was bein' kept alive by one of the late star's admirers, and the house looks dark for everybody.

Accordin' to the door man, no one has left the buildin' since the shot, so that's that. I get a list of the entire company from Goodman. Then the wagon shows up, with Smoot and Taylor, a handful of cops, and a matron to handle the chorus.

Leadin' the way into the fatal dressin' room, I find Magimple nowhere in evidence; which is beyond me, because I didn't see him go out. The doc eyes the unguarded body reproachfully. I recall Murray's roof-garden, poke my head out the window, and there he is bendin' over a lit match.

"Hey! What's the idea?" I demand.

"'Say," he calls back, "I don't find no gun, but there's footprints down here, just like I told you."

"Okay. Leave 'em there," I bawls. "Get along in here now and gimme a hand."

"Be right with you," he mumbles.

Well, the doc can't give us much except she was shot at close range and died instantly. The bullet's lodged in the body, so he'll have to tell us about that later, and there's no gun.

The whole troupe lines the doorways

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and the balcony as the wicker basket makes its way down and out. Most of 'em are still in costume—an awe-struck bunch of half-clad, grease-painted, South Sea islanders.

As the body goes out the door you can feel the tension break. I hands my list over to Smoot and Taylor, with orders to run everybody into their dressin' rooms. Then me and Murray retires to the scene of the murder and sends for the star's maid.

II

MRS. McCARTHY is an old hoofer which gin and swollen ankles has put off the boards. She collapsed after the discovery of the body, and is only abroad now by grace of a pint of restorative which she's clutchin' with one hand under her apron.

She left the dressin' room five minutes before the act closed, says she, and stood in the wings with Miss Gay's wrap. The actress took this; then sent her around the corner for a bromo. She heard the shot as she was mountin' the stairway on her return.

"See any one leave this room?"

She shakes her head.

"See anything of a gun?"

"No, sor. I just took one look and then run after Mr. Goodman."

"See here," fires Magimple, brandishin' his cigar. "Looks to me like this gal got rid of you so she could entertain some visitor between acts."

"Between acts she dressed, sor."

"But why didn't she send the call-boy for that bromo?"

"Because he was busy rushin' beer," she hands him.

"Say, you can't tell me she didn't have affairs," insists Murray.

"Only one at a time," says the loyal servant, noddin' toward a framed photo on the dressin' table. "I know of no affairs that should've caused any one to do 'er ill. She had a heart of gold. Look at 'er totin' an old shoe like me along for a maid! She was the spirit of goodness, rest 'er soul."

She swallows hard and nervously fingers the gin bottle. We lets her go.

Murray turns belligerently on the framed photo. "Who is this mug?"

"Eddie Cooke, the millionaire who was backin' the show," I supplies. "Lives in New York, so he's out."

"All right." He hunches his fat shoulders. "But we'll soon get to the bottom of this. I know these people; they're always willin' to talk."

"They talk too good, if you ask me," I sniffs. "The old lady made monkeys outa you."

"Oh yeah?" Full of indignation, he follows me next door.

This is occupied by Fritzie Cooper, the nifty blonde co-star. With her is Rex Mulford, and one Betsy Pringle who steps outa the chorus for a few specialty numbers. These two are clad for the street, but Fritzie is still in her island plumage—a cocktail in one hand, a sandwich in the other.

A big blowout, you recall, was scheduled for back stage to celebrate the openin'. Well, all the ingredients bein' on hand—and everybody feelin' in need of 'em—they have somehow filtered around. I don't like the look of this, but I guess the boys couldn't stop it. Magimple strikes an imposin' posture while I go through for the missin' weapon. Then he opens up on Fritzie.

"What was you doin' when you heard the shot?"

"Powderin' my armpits, since you ask."

I was afraid of this. Magimple winces and tries again.

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"What did you think it was?"

"A shot."

"Then why didn't you investigate?"

"Because I don't rate a maid like the illustrious star. Maybe you don't know it, but the less you wear the more careful you gotta be putting it on."

"But didn't you poke your head out the door or nothin'?"

"Not till I was fully clad. By that time Goodman was there."

"Did you hear any noises? Anything to suggest that Miss Gay wasn't alone?"

"Didn't have to. I *knew* she wasn't alone."

Murray's eyes pop wide, and Betsy Pringle springs up with a cry of protest: "Fritzie!"

"Well, she wasn't," flares Fritzie. "He flew out to Boise, and he flew out to Denver. Why wouldn't he fly out here? I followed her bow legs all along the balcony. She turned in her door just ahead of me. I heard her just as plain as day: 'Eddie! *You* here?'"

Pringle turns a dumb appeal to Mulford, and them two have a drink.

"You mean Eddie Cooke?" Magimple perks.

"That's right; the Biscuit King, and Lola's sugar daddy."

"For heck's sake, Fritzie," cries Pringle. "Think of yer job!"

"Aw *I* ain't got arthritis." The co-star curls her lip with disdain. "I can get a job any time."

FLUSHIN' scarlet, Pringle springs forward and clutches Murray by the lapels. "Listen," she cries; "she's just half off her nut, with the show closin' and all. What did McCarthy tell you? Just answer me that."

"That's my business," splutters Murray, backin' up.

"But it was a lotta slush, wasn't it?" She hangs right on. "Well, don't believe it. Gay wasn't packin' McCarthy for love. It was to keep her quiet about Fred, that's what. McCarthy had a son she thought the world of. Two years ago Gay done him dirty and he jumped off a East River pier. Ask the old girl about that and you'll start gettin' somewhere!"

She flings away and grabs for the bottle. Murray gulps, and beads of perspiration start wellin' out on his forehead. I tackle Mulford, and get the fastest one yet. He don't know nothin', says he, except that if we run out of suspects he can give us two or three. To which Fritzie adds that he mighta done it himself, and how th' deuce long are we gonna keep 'em cooped up like this?

"Stick around!" barks Magimple, and makes for the door.

"Whew!" he emits, moppin' his brow. "Didn't I tell you this would be a cinch? Look't, we got three suspects already. Do you think Mrs. McCarthy coulda jumped out that window?"

"Aw, don't be a simp!"

"Well, somebody did. Anyhow, she had a motive, and she's gotta be held on suspicion. And Mulford oughta be held. And now I'm gonna check up on this guy Cooke. Look over that list, Shorty, and see if there's any other Eddies in this screwy outfit."

I hunt up the list while he's callin' headquarters, and then take a sour look around. All is not well. This gang is bred in the tradition that the show must go on regardless; and likewise it seems, so must the party. Our men are doin' the best they can, but the whole company is now playin' hide-an'-go-seek, with the cops "it." On both floors, doors are openin' and closin', and the corridors are full of laughter.

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Magimple rejoins me. "The cap'n says swell," he beams.

"Yeah. You probably give him the idea," I snorts. "Listen, we've gotta move through this bunch fast before they get out of hand. You take Smoot and work half this list while I take Taylor and cover the other half."

So we start, and, no reflection on the profession in general, this is the toughest bunch of guys and dolls I've ever seen assembled on one bill. The outfit is rotten to the core with intrigues and jealousies. Everybody's tongue is loosened by liquor and the common calamity, and do they talk!

A few minutes later I pass Magimple in the hall. "Zowie!" he elates, rubbin' his hands. "I got two more. Fritizie coulda done it; she threatened to cut the Gay's tuneless windpipe while they was playin' Salt Lake. And Betsy Pringle had a swell motive. They tell me Cooke was her lumpa sugar before Lola lit on 'im."

Smoot, standin' patiently behind him, taps a finger on his forehead.

"I'm hearin' the same line, Murray," I warns. "Don't let it addle ya. What we need is facts, and that missin' revolver."

"I know," he rattles. "But there's *five* arrests I can make already!"

He bustles off down the corridor. I shakes my head and turns to Taylor. "What do you think?"

"I think they're ten up on us," he snorts, "and we're listenin' to a lotta belch."

"Me too," says I. "We'll try a couple more, and then chuck it. In the meantime here's somethin' that occurs to me. You phone the office and have 'em check on the suicide of one Fred McCarthy in New York two years ago."

He departs, and I walk in on the comedian. He's alone—not even a bottle—and he eyes me darkly through his burnt cork as I frisks him and combs the joint. But when I'm through, he opens up complete in one issue.

"I had nothin' against the star but her salary. I was down havin' a smoke in the wash room and didn't even hear the shot. I only know one thing; that it'd be smart of you to find out who ditched a revolver in the life-boat."

"The which?"

"The life-boat. One of the props for act two."

"Oh! Thanks."

Outside I bumps into Magimple again. "Got another!" he pipes. "And this one's got teeth in it."

"Yeah. Hen's teeth," husks Smoot. He follows him in next door, and I makes for the balcony.

III

THE scene that greets me from below is a bedlam. The party has refused to remain confined to the dressin' rooms, and has overflowed to the stage. About twenty of the cast have improvised a night club outa sundry props, and are takin' turns about as patrons and entertainers.

At present, Fritzie Cooper is doin' the rumba. And the music for this classic is bein' furnished by two chorus men beatin' on the bottom of that upturned life-boat.

At sight of this I leap for the stairs. When I'm halfway down, th e place blinks into total darkness. Whoever hid that gun has pulled the main light switch. A composite scream issues from the stage and the upper rooms. I miss my footin', and go headlong.

"Lights!" I howls, scramblin' to my feet.

Taylor, back on the job, shoves me

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his torch. I pick up the boat and we both dash toward the figure crouched beside it. The dislodged gun is clutched in the man's hand as we drag him upright.

"Sol Goodman!" I exclaims.

"But I ain't got a thing to do with it!" he squeals in terror. "Simply I seen my gun up there and knew it wouldn't do me no good to have it found by the body, and—"

"Find the janitor and get these lights on," I orders.

Somebody shoves this guy forward and he restores the lights. We clap bracelets on Goodman and lock him up, and a momentary hush is shocked into the assemblage. But only momentary. That three minutes of darkness has dislodged everybody aloft, and now we're in for it. Down the stairs they come floodin', chorus and all, past two helpless cops and the frantic matron. In their wake is Magimple, wildly wavin' his arms.

"What's the idea dousin' them lights?" he blusters. "I was just gettin' another lead from the soprano when she walked out on me in the dark."

"Never mind that now," I snaps, and tells him what I've got on Goodman.

"But his name ain't Eddie," he objects.

"I know, but maybe Fritzie was hearin' things. Anyhow he's our best bet so far, and if we can dig up a motive on him—"

"I got a motive," he pops, and starts pawin' through his notes. "Get a load of this: Lol Gay got Goodman his job. Ever [illegible]en she's not only been managin' the company, but nickin' him for a quarter of his salary!"

"Gosh! That fits."

"Sure," he beams. "I got motives for everybody. Wait a minute now, and I'll tell you if he done it." He hunches his fat shoulders and plunges off through the millin' crowd.

I looks around in despair. The whole company is now on the stage, and mixed with 'em is half a dozen hawks of the press.

"Who let them guys in?" I explodes.

"I cannot tell a lie," grunts Smoot. "Magimple done it."

"He *would!*" I chokes, and dives for a phone. Because a press account of this mêlée ain't gonna do the department no good. If we confiscated the liquor in the beginnin', we mighta stood a chance, but we couldn't do nothin' now without startin' a riot. You can handle a bunch of men, but not a lotta women, and the boys have got all they can do to keep the curtain down and the doors guarded.

"Just gonna call you," says the sergeant. "Your bullet was a thirty-two."

"Good," says I, this bein' the bore of Goodman's gun.

"And here's a definite clue: There was half of a plain gold cuff link caught in the sleeve of the dead gal's dressin' gown."

"Okay. Is the cap'n there? Put me through to him."

Allen's voice is full of anxiety: "Well, how's it shapin' up?"

"Yes and no."

"But Magimple phoned it was in the bag," he complains.

"It's a difficult situation," says I, steppin' careful. "In fact, if it would be anyways possible, I think the whole gang should be dumped right in the cooler."

"I'll make it possible!" barks the old boy. "They can't bill an indecent show in this town, stage a murder, and

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then top it off with a brawl! Line 'em up. I'll have some wagons sent right over."

WELL, you could as easy line up a swarm of bees, but we do the best we can. All the bums in the jug is turned out in their nightshirts; our two Marias, both city ambulances, and a dump truck backs up to the stage door and we pour out the works. Includin' the press! Hopefully I examine all the cuffs. Goodman is the last out—wearin' a button shirt. Oh well, he coulda changed it somewhere, thinks I.

As the last echo dies away down the alley, I survey the empty stage—now a wreck of torn scenery, broken flasks, and shreds of blue uniform—and breathe a hearty sigh. Then here comes Magimple through the back doorway, totin' a long ladder, and smeared with white from the chin down.

"What'n heck you been into?" I blinks.

"Plaster Paris, which the janitor uses to kill rats. He mixes it with corn meal, and—"

"Omit that. What *you* been doin' with it?"

"Makin' a cast of them footprints," he states proudly.

"Oh. Well, give us a hand now; we've got a busted cuff link to locate."

"Go right ahead," he shrugs, dustin' his broad front. "I never been no hand for set routine. It's always scientific deduction which solves these cases in the end, and as soon as that plaster sets—"

"Sure. I know," I sighs. "Come on, boys."

Well, we turned the theater inside out and don't locate that cuff link. I stagger home about dawn and find Magimple snorin' peaceful in the security of his plaster cast. And of course, I hope he's right.

I hit the squad room bright and early, open the mornin' paper and scan the heads. Eighty arrests have been made, and a statement is expected.

"So they wouldn't talk, eh?" cracks the sergeant.

I just grins. It looks like for once a case is treatin' me right. But did you ever know me to have any luck? The phone rings. The sergeant thumbs significantly toward the sanctum, and I straightens my tie and marches in.

Cap'n Allen is in conference with our consultin' criminologist. He greets me with a troubled frown and comes right to the point.

"Your bullet don't match your gun barrel."

"You mean she wasn't killed with Goodman's gun?" I blinks.

"That's what I mean," says he, tappin' the expert's photos. "You've got to dig deeper there, or you've got no case. Er—what's Magimple doin'?"

"Him! Oh, I think he's cleanin' up some tag ends down at the theater."

"Good. Valuable man—thorough—scientific. Well, that's all, Pepper. Get goin'."

I ducks back into the squad room much deflated. And there stands Magimple depositin' a newspaper parcel on the sergeant's desk. Bulgin' with importance he undoes this, revealin' a hunk of dirty plaster about the size of a shoe box. I takes a long squint at it and explodes: "What's that? A bust of Napoleon?"

"That's the cast I made last night."

"Aw nerts! And here I thought maybe you *had* somethin'."

"I've got the footprint of the murderer," he splutters indignantly, "and as soon as I match it up with one of Goodman's shoes—"

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"You've lost a chapter. Goodman is *out*," I informs, and spills him the bad news.

"All right—all right!" He lifts a soothin' hand. "We've got plenty more suspects, ain't we? You don't see me tearin' my hair. Just gimme a little time, and—"

The phone rings. It's his reply from New York. Mr. Edward Cooke cannot be located, and it's rumored that he departed by plane for the west.

"See?" Murray spreads his palms bountifully. "There's another one. When you locate him, Shorty, just bring me one of his shoes, and—"

"Aw more nerts!" I bawls, hunts up Smoot and Taylor and goes stormin' out.

IV

WELL, to cut a long mornin' short, we picks up that photo at the theater—figurin' if Cooke's here he's in cognito—and about noon I nabs him boardin' a plane at the air port. I books him quietly under his misnomer, and then hustles down to report.

What I walk into is plenty. Allen is cloistered with the coroner, the D. A., and the City Manager, and the air is blue.

"You! Do you know what you've handed in here?" he explodes, poundin' the reports piled on his desk. "When we started on these people, to shape up the coroner's investigation, every last one of 'em went back on his story!"

"No foolin'?" I gulps.

"I have just said so," he snaps. "You were listenin' to a lot of drunken drivel and stored up venom and didn't have sense enough to know it. Here the case is fourteen hours old and hasn't progressed an inch. What am I to tell the papers?"

"I just pulled in Eddie Cooke," I mentions modestly.

"You did! Why didn't you *say* so?"

The room rises with one accord, and I leads the way.

But where to? Lola Gay was murdered at 9:30, and damned if Cooke don't produce four witnesses to prove that his plane didn't arrive till midnight! They let him outa there so fast it burns the hinges, but the damage is done. The papers have smelled a rat and matched him up with their morgue photos, and by two o'clock the streets is full of extras on the arrest, with a broad hint at the collapse of all existin' evidence.

Allen nearly chokes tellin' me about it. "In all my life I never seen the like of this!" he raves. "You were right there at the scene of the crime, and you've bungled it from first to last. We'll be lucky if we aren't sued for false arrest. And say, what do you know about these people's shoes?"

"*Shoes?*" I explodes.

"That's what I said. They claim they all woke up this mornin' without any footwear."

"Nothin'!"

"Very well. Get goin'. I can only hold 'em forty-eight hours, you know. Start back at the beginnin' and see if you can't work up a case."

I get goin'. If Magimple thinks I'm gonna run interference for him all his life he's crazy. What do I know about these people's shoes! Somethin' tells me I know plenty!

Arrived at our apartment I finds Bosco, our colored manservant, seated in the livin' room behind a ugly frown.

"Is Magimple here?"

He protrudes his thick lips toward the kitchen, and I kicks open the swing door. There stands Murray in a kitchen apron stirrin' a batch of master

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in a mixin' bowl—with seventy-nine pairs of shoes piled up on the kitchen table!

"So *here* you are," I cries. "Listen. I found Cooke, but he got sprung in no time, and the rest of the case has fallen apart like a dime watch."

"'You mean out of eighty arrests and all them motives we've got no case?" he demands, incredulous.

"'That's what I mean. We've got to start right at the beginnin' and build up again. Now here's somethin' that occurs to me: I've checked on the McCarthy suicide, and it was two weeks before they fished his body outa the drink. Now if you've ever seen a floater after two weeks—"

He's payin' me no heed at all, and now he cuts in: "The shoe is yer positive—see?—leavin' a imprint which is negative. Now what you want is a split negative to compare with yer sample negatives. So you shellac yer positive, like this—"

Here he picks up that malformed hunk of plaster and I howls: "But, Murray, how many times must I tell you that ain't a footprint?"

"Eh? Since when ain't a print made by a foot a footprint?" he demands.

"I mean it ain't good for nothin'. It coulda been made by an ox, or a grompus, or a fallin' brickbat!"

"I say this is the murderer's footprint, and the key to this whole business." Stubbornly he sets his triple chin, wavin' the plaster under my nose, and suddenly I sees red.

"'Gimme that!" Snatchin' it from him I heaves it at the wall, and it tinkles to the floor in a hundred pieces.

"Now bundle up them shoes," I barks, "and take 'em back to the jail before we get sued for 'em. Then you come along with me. Understand?"

But he's dropped to his knees beside the fragments, and now he rises with a whoop.

"Look't! What'd I tell ya?" And there in his fat fingers is half of a gold cuff link.

"'Well blow me fer a whistle!" I explodes. "Except it don't tell you nothin', because you don't know whose footprint that was."

HE ain't listenin'. He's back on the floor examinin' them fragments. And now he scrambles up and starts strugglin' outa the apron.

"Follow me!" he pipes, grabs his coat and hat on the way out, and don't even wait for the elevator.

"'But see here now, Murray," I protests as we careens across town. "We got no time for any more hokus-pokus."

"'Shut up!" he bellers. "I know what I'm doin'."

He zooms down the alley in back of the theater, and sails through the stage door with his coattails flyin'. Inside all is dark and silent. He pauses in the middle of the deserted stage; then makes for a crack of light showin' through a door at the rear. We enter a small storeroom, and there on a box we find the janitor—a tired-lookin' young fella with a sad mustache—solemnly tapin' a busted broom handle.

"'Hello." He looks up with surprise. "Somethin' I can do for ya?"

"Yeah," fires Murray, clutchin' him by the collar. "'You can come along to headquarters for that murder last night."

"'*Me?*" cries the guy, goin' white. "You musta made a mistake. I'm not with the show. My name is Wilson, and—"

"Your name is *Mud*," blustered Magimple. "And you done it all right." Snappin' the cuffs on him, he boosts

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him out to the car and then turns to me: "I'll take him in. You go search his room and see what you find."

Well, what I find is a soiled shirt with a gold cuff link in one sleeve and the other empty, a thirty-two revolver, and half a dozen letters signed "Your loving mother." These we check against Mrs. McCarthy's scribble, and have a full confession in no time.

You see, Fred McCarthy was never dead at all, and his mother knew it. And she knew of his plan to confront Lola Gay with himself in person, hopin' for a reconciliation. But she didn't know of his determination to plug her if she turned him down.

What Fritzie Cooper heard was the name "Freddie" not "Eddie." He was waitin' in Lola's dressin' room at the end of the act, for her to rush into his arms. But she called him a bum instead. So he let her have it, dropped down the wall, and into the window of the storeroom. The shot was a big surprise to the old lady, but she covered for him the best she could by plantin' Goodman's gun. In fact it was the very angle I was startin' to work on, but how Magimple tumbled to it is a mystery to me.

Which it remains so till the next mornin'; because I can't get near him the rest of the day, he's so busy gettin' his picture took. And you should see the mornin' papers:

STAR'S MURDERER TRAPPED BY DEPARTMENT ACE! INSPECTOR MAGIMPLE SCORES AGAIN!

"Hey!" I barks across the breakfast board. "What do they mean, '—guardian of our high moral standards as well as our law and order'?"

"Oh, that's about me closin' up the show." And another spoonful of oatmeal disappears.

"*You* closin' it up! Why, you was the most appreciative customer in the house!"

No answer.

I reads on and strikes that plaster cast—'to which he doggedly held while all the rest of the force was bein' misled by the drunken testimony of the revelin' company.'

"Hey! What d'ya mean, you followed a straight line of testimony from the murderer's footprint to his door? That guy told us in his confession that he walked the brick cornice, and never once that evening set foot on that roof-garden."

"Did he?" he coughs. "I didn't happen to notice."

"Yeah. There's times when you ain't very noticeable," I cries. "Listen here. How did you get onto that roof when you first went ploughin' around there?"

"Jumped outa the window."

"I *knew* it!" I howls. "Then what you done was to make a print of your own big foot!"

Slowly he lowers the paper and scowls at me reproachfully: "What's the difference? It solved the case, didn't it?"

"Yeah," I splutters, beside myself. "But if you picked up that cuff link in yer *own footprint,* how did you know who dropped it there?"

"Simple," he munches, disappearin' again behind the news. "It wasn't picked up in the footprint. It was in the cast itself. So when you busted it, and I discovered that, I knew right away the janitor had dropped it in the plaster when he dished it out for me last night."

"What!" I collapses. "Of all the cockeyed luck! Honest t'gosh, Murray, you'd fall down a well and light in a rowboat!"

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Holding the knife behind him; Gregg said: "I'm in trouble."

The Scarlet Letter

By

Ray Cummings

He Had Just Killed the Man—and He Knew It Was a Perfect Crime. But He Didn't Know That Murder Always Marks a Man Unmistakably!

GEORGE GREGG reached home at eleven P.M. that Saturday evening. The weather was raw and chilly—an overcast sky and the feel of rain or snow in the air. Gregg wore a light overcoat over his dinner clothes. He was a handsome young fellow. An artist; protégé of Kenneth Rance, the famous illustrator, with whom he lived.

The home of Kenneth Rance was a big rambling old-fashioned three-story frame house at the end of a somewhat lonely street here on the edge of town. There were no servants; just Rance, his niece, Dianne Walters—and Gregg. The house was dark now, except for lights that marked the lower front room, which was Rance's studio.

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Gregg stood for a moment on the path at a corner of the fence. He had been spending the evening with friends on the other side of town, about a mile away. He had left them at quarter of eleven. It wouldn't provide an alibi; but Gregg was not concerned with that, for the idea of murdering Rance was still only a vague conjecture in his mind. He would kill Rance—if necessary. But he would plan it carefully.

Gregg's attention was captured now by the moving blobs of silhouetted figures against the lighted studio windows. Then the blobs vanished; and a moment later the hall door to the verandah opened. The Rance grounds, and the dark empty street here were tree-shrouded. Gregg was behind a tree trunk; in the silence he heard the voices on the verandah. Rance and Dianne were saying goodnight to a young man visitor. Gregg knew him — a hardware salesman named John Martin—a fellow fascinated by Dianne's beauty—or the money she would inherit from Rance. Gregg's rival. An ironic sneer pulled at Gregg's handsome mouth. What the hell chance did a hardware salesman have? None. And the only reason Martin didn't know it was because he was too dumb.

"Goodnight, John."

"Goodnight, Dianne. Goodnight, Mr. Rance."

The verandah door closed. The figure of John Martin crossed the street and headed toward town. Gregg shifted behind the tree trunk so that Martin would not see him. Queer that subconsciously now, he was taking the precautions of a murderer! As though the momentous events which were upon him were making themselves felt, so that he stood, suddenly breathless and wary.

Rance and Dianne quite evidently went back into the studio. Perhaps she was posing for him. He often used her as a model; her head was familiar on the covers of many magazines. Gregg presently went quietly up the verandah steps. The studio front window was here; its shade was down but the window was open a trifle. Abruptly Gregg stiffened; he heard Rance's voice:

"I tell you, Dianne, you can't do it. You're making a mistake. He's no good."

"But, Uncle—please—let me—"

"Let you what?"

"Let me explain. I—I love him. We love each other—"

"He loves nobody but his handsome self. You're a fool, Dianne—"

"Uncle—please—!"

"So was I a fool, thinking I could make an artist out of him. For five years he's been playing me for a sucker. But I'm through with him and he knows it."

Gregg knew it, indeed. On the dark verandah he stood tense, with his heart pounding his ribs and the leering specter of murder a sudden reality beside him. The window shade was up an inch from the bottom. By crouching, he could see a portion of the room: the wizened, sandy-gray-haired Rance striding excitedly up and down; the easel, with a big canvas on which was a partially finished pastel study of Dianne; and Dianne herself, her living beauty so much more vivid than any pastel could depict it—Dianne in a chair gazing, with almost tearful apprehension at her uncle.

"I tell you I'm through with him," Rance repeated. "Out of my will he goes—the first chance I have to get to the lawyers' and change it. You're only a child. You're in love with his handsome face. He's got a dozen girls

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like you—any pool room loafer downtown could tell you. Wears a dress suit every night; plays the gentleman artist—"

"Uncle! You—you're just ranting—!"

"He never had any idea of being an artist! A sucker out of me. An' now he dares make love to you—"

"We're going to be married, Uncle. I'm eighteen—"

The abrupt firmness of her tone made Rance stop before her, startled, so that he looked almost frightened.

"Dianne! You don't know what you're talking about. I never realized—"

"I've promised him, Uncle. I love him—"

Then old Rance's temper flared again. "If you do, then I'm finished with you. Not a penny of my money do you ever get."

SHE had a temper of her own. She leaped to her feet, trembling. "I don't want your money, Uncle Kenneth. You've no right to stand between me and the man I love."

"You don't love him—he's got you hypnotized. He fooled me—I admit it." He had his hands on her shoulders, holding her as she tried impetuously to turn away. His voice softened. "Dianne, dear, you've got to listen to me. Now this lad, John Martin—I guess he loves you. Does he?"

"Yes," she murmured. "He—he proposed to me tonight. I said no."

"He's a good solid fellow, Dianne. Not artistic—maybe that's an advantage, I don't know. I like him—I think maybe you'd be happy with him. It's not for me to say—"

"But you are saying, Uncle. And it's George I love. You haven't any right—"

Still he held her. "I haven't any right to let you wreck your life. And I won't."

The listening George Gregg stood tense, with his heart pounding his ribs and his breath sticking in his throat. As he moved again to the doorway, one of his feet touched something soft. He stooped, picked up a man's glove. He recognized it. John Martin's glove, which undoubtedly he had dropped here at the verandah door just a moment ago when he said goodnight.

Thoughts are instant things. Gregg stuffed the glove into his overcoat pocket—and in that moment, exactly what he was going to do was clear in his mind. Within the studio Dianne now was sobbing. Gregg once more stooped by the window. He saw Rance's arms go around the girl, but she pulled away and ran from the room, slamming the door. For a moment Rance stood staring after her; then he sighed, shrugged and sat before his easel, with his box of pastels beside him.

The scalpel, sharp-pointed as a stiletto, with which Rance cut his drawing boards, lay on his work table. Gregg could see it there now. He reached into his overcoat pocket; he put Martin's glove on his right hand. He found that it was a left-hand glove—thin, gray suède, with a fleece lining. Martin's hand evidently was larger than his own, so that though it stuck a bit on Gregg's big seal ring, nevertheless he crammed it on. It felt stiff and awkward, with the back of it at his palm. But he clenched his fist; limbered it. What the hell! It would serve to hold that knife. . . .

Very quietly Gregg opened the front door. In the dark hall he stood alertly listening. For a moment he heard Dianne's footsteps upstairs; then the

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slamming of her distant bedroom door. In this big rambling house no sounds would carry up to her. Twenty feet from him, along the lower hall, was the closed door of the studio. He went like a cat on the padded floor; opened the door; darted in, and closed it.

Rance, at his easel, heard the click, and swung around.

"Oh, it's you—"

"Yes, it's me—" Gregg was panting; his voice was low, furtive. "Don't talk so loud, please." Above everything, their voices mustn't reach Dianne upstairs. This would only take a minute! Tumultuous minute! He must not make any errors now! He stood with his back against the door, his gloved right hand behind him. His dark overcoat was open, disclosing his spotless dinner clothes. With his left hand he reached into an inner pocket.

Rance stared. "What's the matter? You look like a ghost."

"Not so loud—please. I got a letter tonight. I'm in a jam."

Stalling for time. Just a minute now—get that knife—one stab of that knife—a hand over his mouth maybe to stifle his scream. . . .

"I'm in trouble," Gregg added softly. "I need your help."

He took a step; the work table was here; the knife lay gleaming.

Ironic contempt swept Rance's thin, wizened face. "In trouble? Well, is that surprising? More gambling, that I mustn't tell Dianne about? Or another girl after you—"

Hot words of anger choked Gregg, but he left them unsaid. This was so easy! Rance was doing just the perfect thing: shrugging, turning his back so he faced his easel again, contemptuously resuming his work. Gregg's mind seethed with tumultuous thoughts. Just a few seconds now—a step, and he'd have the knife. . . . One swift stab. . . . He saw that Rance was working with finishing touches on the lips of Dianne on the canvas. Lips so beautiful—in life, so warm to kiss. They would be for Gregg—Dianne and her money. . . .

His fingers within John Martin's glove closed on the knife. . . . One blow now into old Rance's back. . . . But suddenly Rance swung around and demanded:

"What do you mean, got a letter tonight?"

Gregg's hand, holding the knife now, dangled behind him. He panted:

"I'm in trouble—here's the letter." Accursed shortness of breath. . . . His heart racing. . . . With his left hand he reached into the inner pocket of his overcoat. The letter was nothing important—a bill from the local tobacconist for a month's cigarettes. But it held Rance's attention. His gaze went to it as he leaned forward.

Gregg's gloved hand came up, stabbed forward and down. Old Rance must have seen the glinting knife-blade. Surprise, then vague terror swept his face. He seemed to mumble as he lunged half to his feet.

And then the knife went in. Gruesome thrust. . . . Now! Twist it! Hold him. . . !

II

THE scene blurred into a chaos of horror for Gregg. He was aware that he had dropped the letter with his left hand fumbling for Rance's mouth. . . . He mustn't scream! Don't let him scream! . . . There was no scream. Rance staggering—his arms flailing—one of his hands groping as though for Gregg's neck. Futile! He couldn't do anything. He was dying, just an old man dying. . . .

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Horrible, ghastly seconds while Gregg's gloved fingers wildly thrust the knife to its hilt! . . . Rance must have tried to scream, but it was only a choked gurgle of blood. . . . God! Why didn't he fall!

Gregg suddenly heard his own low, wild voice: "Let me go—you damned old buzzard—!"

Gruesome, as though a dead man was sagging here, clinging, trying to fight. . . . Then, in another second, the sagging body of Rance slumped forward so that Gregg shook himself free and nimbly leaped backward and stood panting. The body hit the floor, face downward with a little thud; twitched and lay still.

Done! The thing was over! Just those few seconds. . . . Gregg for a moment stood panting, wild-eyed, with the frenzy of murder so hot within him that his blood seemed liquid fire in his veins. Then the frenzy passed and he stood triumphant. How easy it had been! Damned old buzzard—dead now. He couldn't change his will and throw Gregg out in the cold. He couldn't persuade Dianne now, that she would wreck her life marrying the handsome George Gregg. He couldn't do a damn thing, now, but lie there weltering. . . .

Then Gregg suddenly realized that he must hurry. . . . Things to do now. He must think swiftly—calmly—make no errors. . . . The knife lay buried to its hilt in Rance's heart. No fingerprints would be on its handle. . . .

Gregg darted to the door; with his gloved fingers he slid its bolt, locking it here on the inside. Hardly a minute had passed. The house was silent; Dianne, far upstairs, had heard nothing. Gregg turned back into the room. His soft black hat was still on his head; his clothes were hardly disheveled. Blood on him? He knew there was none. Blood must have welled around the wound, but he saw now that there was none even on the glove. No mirror was in the room; but for a moment Gregg stood carefully examining himself, adjusting his clothes. Nothing wrong. Where would be the best place to drop the glove? Evidence against John Martin. Maybe it wouldn't convict him. What the hell difference? The police could think what they liked, the'd never prove anything against Gregg. . . .

He decided that the best place for the glove would be wrapped around the handle of the knife. As though Martin had held the loose glove around the knife handle, and in the excitement had forgotten and left it there. . . .

Gruesome, this goggling, slumped, dead thing. . . . The chest with the knife was downward, pressed against the floor. Very carefully, with his gloved hand, Gregg turned the body partly over. Then he ripped off the glove, dropped it on the knife handle where blood now had welled with a crimson stain on Rance's shirt. . . .

That did it. The glove and the knife looked perfectly rational—a panic-stricken murderer overlooking this vital clue. . . . Gregg was about to turn away when abruptly he went cold with horror. Panicky murderer? Overlooking a vital clue? Here on the floor was Gregg's letter—the tobacconist's bill! The body had fallen on it. A scarlet letter now, with the blood of the dead man staining it! Vital clue indeed! Suppose he hadn't happened to turn the body over? The police would have found this scarlet letter; the tobacconist would have testified that just this evening he had handed the bill to Gregg! Damning evidence!

And as Gregg stood horrified, a new frightening thought transfixed him.

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Suppose Martin had come back for his lost glove? The window shade was raised only an inch, but suppose Martin was crouching out there now?

Trapped! But it was only Gregg's wild rush of panic. He mastered it. There was no one outside the window. Martin hadn't come back. Nothing was wrong at all. . . . But he must get out of here at once. Too dangerous. . . .

He seized the blood-stained letter. Burn it? That would be best. There were glowing embers in the fireplace here where Rance, earlier in the evening, had had a fire. Gregg dropped the oblong of paper; touched a match to it. It burned into a little shriveled wisp of ashes. With the poker, he stirred them until they were unrecognizable. . . .

Nothing else to do here. . . . Certainly only two or three minutes had passed since Gregg had entered the room. Only five minutes since Dianne was here. . . . Gregg took a last hasty look. This time he had forgotten nothing. . . . The damnable staring eyes of the dead man seemed following him as he went to the front window; climbed carefully, noiselessly through it to the verandah.

The night was dark; blustery now with wind. Good enough, for that had made the house noisy upstairs so that by no chance could Dianne have heard anything. It wasn't raining; hadn't rained all evening. That was correct, because Gregg was supposed to be only arriving home now—and if it was raining, his clothes would be wet. . . . He was thinking of everything now. He walked noisily on the verandah; then, nonchalantly whistling, he unlatched the front door with his key and went noisily in. . . .

From the bottom of the staircase he called: "Oh, Dianne—you home?"

She answered him in a moment.

"Where's Uncle Kenneth?" he called.

"In the studio, George. He was—a few minutes ago." She appeared at the head of the staircase, in a negligée, with her long black hair flowing over her shoulders.

"Funny," Gregg said, "the door's locked. I just tried it."

Then presently, from the verandah window they stooped and gazed through the slit under the shade; gazed with horror at the mute, tragic scene. Then they ran wildly into the house; and Gregg wildly telephoned the doctor and the police, stammering his shocking news that Kenneth Rance had been murdered.

"I GUESS, Sergeant, it was about ten after eleven when I got here," Gregg said frankly. "I'd been playing cards with Tolly Green and some friends. I took a bit of a walk—it wasn't raining—I needed the exercise."

He was absolutely calm now. It was easy to talk frankly, with just the right touch of excitement which anyone naturally would have at such a time. Gregg had a slight aquaintance with this police sergeant. A friendly fellow, not overly clever, Gregg figured.

They were in the living room, across the hall from the studio. It was quarter of twelve now. What a difference three-quarters of an hour had made! The dim, silent house now was blazing with lights, resounding with the tramp of footsteps. The quiet, lonely neighborhood was milling now with people, miraculously gathered when the police cars arrived.

The neighborhood doctor had come and gone. Kenneth Rance was dead,

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with the knife in his heart; beyond the reach of medical science. There was nothing needed here now but the science of the policemen to figure out who had done it. Gregg smiled to himself. Much good it would do them. . . .

The County Medical Examiner was in the studio now, with two or three police detectives, a fingerprint man, and a photographer. Soon they would be finished. The body would go for autopsy, perhaps. . . .

Somebody had said a while ago that Melvin Cone was in town, and that he was coming. It gave George Gregg a sudden thrill of fear. He had heard of Melvin Cone. A Federal man. A hard fellow to beat, once he got after you. Then Gregg thrust away the fear. What the hell? He wasn't afraid of Cone or anybody else. He'd been too clever with this thing.

Nothing had been said in Gregg's presence, so far, about the glove. He wondered when they'd mention it. When they did, Dianne undoubtedly would recognize it. . . . Dianne was here now, sitting beside Gregg, clinging to him. Still in her negligée, her glorious black hair falling free. . . . Appealing figure, with shocked grief on her beautiful face, and her eyes red from her first burst of weeping. Trustfully she clung to Gregg. That was good—the two of them, so obviously innocent, shocked, grief-stricken.

Dianne and Gregg together had answered most of the questions. No, they hadn't entered the murder room. . . . The police had had to break down the door. . . . No, they knew of no enemy of Rance's. . . . Yes, they agreed the murderer must have locked the door, and escaped by one of the windows, all of which were unlocked.

From the studio now came one of the policemen.

"No fingerprints, Sergeant. He used the glove—"

The glove! At last! The sergeant dangled it now before Gregg and Dianne. Gray suède, left-hand glove, fleece-lined. Gregg so wanted to speak, but he was too clever. He looked dubious, with excited curiosity. And Dianne exclaimed: "John's glove!"

"John?" the sergeant snapped. "John, who?"

So simple. It all came out. John Martin had left here, just a few minutes before the murder. Then the sergeant hurried outside to order a car, or a motorcyclist to go for Martin. . . . So simple. If only Martin wouldn't have an alibi! Probably he wouldn't; he lived alone in a boarding house less than a mile from here—probably went in and went to bed. They'd have him here in a few minutes. . . .

Dianne was shivering in the cold living room. Gregg had discarded his hat; he still wore his overcoat buttoned because he felt shivery himself.

He put his arm around Dianne. "You're cold, sweetheart. Put on my overcoat."

"No, I'm all right. Oh, George—do you think he could have done it? That glove—!"

Gregg shrugged. "I never knew him very well. Maybe I'm jealous—"

"But you needn't be. He—he proposed to me tonight, George. I told him no."

Another chance for which Gregg had been warily waiting! The sergeant was back in the room now, so that Gregg said with raised voice:

"You really ought to tell the sergeant that, Dianne."

"Tell me—what?" the sergeant demanded; and Dianne stammered it out.

"Oh," said the sergeant. "That's interesting."

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Simple. Everything was going just right. Then abruptly from the studio, Melvin Cone came quietly across the hall. Gregg felt his heart jump as though some invisible hand had gripped it. Cone had been here some time, been poking around for clues in the studio. Queer that nobody had mentioned that he was here! Was Gregg under suspicion, that these policemen kept things from him? What had Cone found out? Something which Gregg had overlooked?

Nonsense! . . . Gregg flung away his wild rush of thoughts. Nothing was wrong. This damned Cone was probably a big bluff anyway. . . .

III

GREGG stared with interest at the famous sleuth. A tall, smooth-shaven, rather handsome man. Forty perhaps, with hair graying at the temples. He looked like a successful business executive. He shook hands quietly with Dianne and Gregg as the sergeant introduced him.

"Distressing time for both of you," he said gently. He seemed addressing them both impartially.

"Yes," Gregg said. "If there's anything we can do to help you, Mr. Cone—?"

"Thanks. I wish there were."

He had a very cordial, grave sort of smile. And then Gregg noticed his eyes—mild, blue eyes, but damnably restless. They seemed never still. Darting. Questing. As though the man's calm, poised voice, his smile, were things unconnected with those questing eyes.

Gregg felt suddenly as though he were on a stage, with floodlights and that the eyes were searching every detail of him. . . . Then there was a commotion on the verandah. It brought to Gregg a vast relief; it took Melvin Cone's gaze away.

"They're got him," Cone said. "That's good."

Then John Martin was here. Martin—pallid, frightened, stricken wordless. Cone and the sergeant went out into the hall to question him. Dianne and Gregg sat staring. The voices were a blur, but some of it was audible. He had no alibi! The best he could say was that he'd gone home and gone to bed. The glove was his, of course. He had the mate to it in his overcoat pocket. He had lost it somewhere here.

What a lame story! Gregg sat chuckling as he felt Dianne shuddering beside him. Poor girl—maybe she did have some sneaking love for this fellow Martin. It didn't matter now. Martin was going to jail; maybe to the electric chair. . . .

Then they brought Martin into the sitting room and shoved him into a chair where he sat wordless, so frightened that he looked absolutely guilty as he flung an imploring glance at Dianne. And she murmured impulsively: "Oh, John—I—I don't believe you did it!"

What the hell difference what she believed? Gregg's hand on her arm pressed it with just the right touch of sympathy. But for all his outward masterful calmness, again Gregg felt a shiver. Cone was leaning nonchalantly against the door casement. He did not speak; he just stood there with those darting, questing eyes—first at Martin, then Dianne, then Gregg. Searching. As though, not bothering to talk, he depended on his eyes to show him some hidden motive in the relationship of these three young people. Some hidden motive that by chance word, or look, they might disclose. . . .

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Intolerable silence. Gregg suddenly heard himself saying: "If you've any clue to the murderer, Mr. Cone? Surely you don't think it's John here?"

Clever. Natural. John Martin was a friend.

Cone's eyes for just a moment clung to Gregg's face. And he smiled.

"I don't what to think. Puzzling, isn't it?"

Then abruptly he drew up a chair before Gregg and Dianne, and sat down. Queer. He didn't seem particularly to think that Martin was guilty! It stabbed Gregg with a sudden fright, but he fought against it. Nonsense. This detective wasn't the type to tell all his thoughts. Of course he believed Martin guilty, but he just wanted to be sure.

But Cone's damnable gaze was now frankly searching Gregg. His face, his clothes, his hands. . . . A hand can be so expressive! Gregg abruptly was aware that his fists were clenching! He loosened them. He said:

"No clues at all, Mr. Cone? Just that—that glove?"

"That seems to be all," Cone said. "And the trouble is, maybe Martin did just drop it when he said good-night."

"I did!" Martin exclaimed.

"I—I think so, too," Gregg agreed. He suddenly seemed on the defensive. What nonsense! It was Martin, not himself, who was mainly under suspicion. . . . Or had Cone found some other clue, which offset the glove so that now he was puzzled?

"That's an odd ring you've got, Gregg."

Cone's quiet conversational voice snapped Gregg out of his reverie. The detective's gaze was on Gregg's hands—his right hand—his big seal ring, with its ornate filligree setting fashioned in a circlet of tiny elephants. Gregg felt his heart leap wildly. Was something wrong with his ring?

He stammered: "Yes—odd ring. I've had it for years." He felt an impulse to hide his hands behind him.

Some error? Then what it might be swept Gregg with a tumultuous rush of horror. That fleece-lined glove, awkwardly put on backwards! Gregg recalled now how it had caught in the setting of his ring! Was some of the fleece clinging to this filigree of tiny elephants, so that Cone's keen gaze was seeing it now?

DAMNABLE error! Too late to fix it! Gregg did not dare raise his hand to peer at the ring more closely. . . . Then Cone's gaze darted away; still questing; puzzled, as though the detective felt that there might be some clue still hidden. . . .

And Cone was saying thoughtfully: "If what Martin says should happen to be true. . . . The opportunity—the motive—but where is the proof?"

The sergeant and another policeman were here, standing beside Cone; peering, expectant, as though they sensed that something vital must happen now.

But relief swept Gregg. This damned detective still was puzzled. He seemed to have lost interest in the ring. Nothing wrong with the ring!

Beside him, Gregg felt Dianne stirring uneasily — everyone here was tense. Everyone but Cone, who just sat pondering, puzzled. . . . Then Gregg heard himself murmuring:

"I do wish we could help you, Mr. Cone." He desperately tried to appear nonchalant. He smiled; unbuttoned his overcoat, reached into his inner pocket for his cigarettes.

But what was this? Cone suddenly stiffened; staring. The sergeant was

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staring; the other policeman—staring. From across the room, John Martin was staring.

And the blue eyes on Cone no longer were mild. No longer questing, for there was a menacing triumph flashing from them as abruptly they had come to the end of the trail.

And Cone's voice rasped: "Delivered into my hands, by Jove! I've got you, Gregg!"

Accusation! The room whirled before Gregg. Got him? What rot! This was a bluff! This damned detective, puzzled, trying to run a bluff. Hold firm!... He felt Dianne's frightened hand on his arm; heard her voice:

"Why — why, George! What does he mean? How does he dare—?"

Hold firm! Say nothing! Just a damn bluff! He saw Cone's gaze go to Dianne; and Cone said gently: "A shock for you, Miss Walters. I'm sorry—but it's best in the end. He would have wrecked your life—"

Hold firm! Gregg stared numbed, as the trembling Dianne leaped up.

"George, guilty! Why—why—"

"He is," Cone said, still gently. And now Martin had come and was holding Dianne, and the girl suddenly was weeping!

"Obviously," Cone added, "you're very young, Miss Walters. I think maybe you got confused. Maybe it's this young man Martin you love. I hope so. He seems a very nice young fellow. He tells me Mr. Rance approved of him. He tells me that Mr. Rance promised to stop you, if he could, from marrying this fellow Gregg. That seems like Gregg's motive. And here's the obvious proof of his guilt."

What the hell was all this? Despite his efforts to keep silent, Gregg heard himself saying: "What the devil do you mean? Obvious? What's obvious?"

Cone snapped around. "Like Hester Pryne," he said ironically. "She also, had a scarlet letter."

Hester Pryne? What the devil did that mean? Scarlet letter? But he burned the scarlet letter in the fireplace?

"Hester Pryne," Cone was saying, "the heroine of Hawthorne's story. Don't you remember? They branded her with a scarlet letter 'A' because she was an adulteress."

In the chaos of the whirling room Gregg heard himself murmuring: "What you mean? I don't see—"

"Kenneth Rance was working with pastels when you stabbed him," Cone said. "We found a little piece of crimson chalk in his hand—he probably was working on the lips of the girl in the picture. And as he died—by accident or design—or maybe just that bad luck which works against every murderer—he branded you, Gregg! We'll show you—"

Suddenly Cone was pulling Gregg to his feet, shoving him to a big mirror here on the living room wall. And Gregg numbly stared. . . . Damnable mischance! No mirror had been in the murder room. He had examined himself so carefully, but without a mirror he couldn't see the top of his full dress, starched shirt bosom. And his buttoned overcoat had hid it from Cone until just now.

Against all his efforts he heard himself stammering: "Why—why I didn't know that was there! You've got me!"

A scarlet chalk mark was high on his starched shirt bosom, just below his necktie. A little wavy line, which seemed to make a letter.

Scarlet letter! Branded! "M" for murderer!

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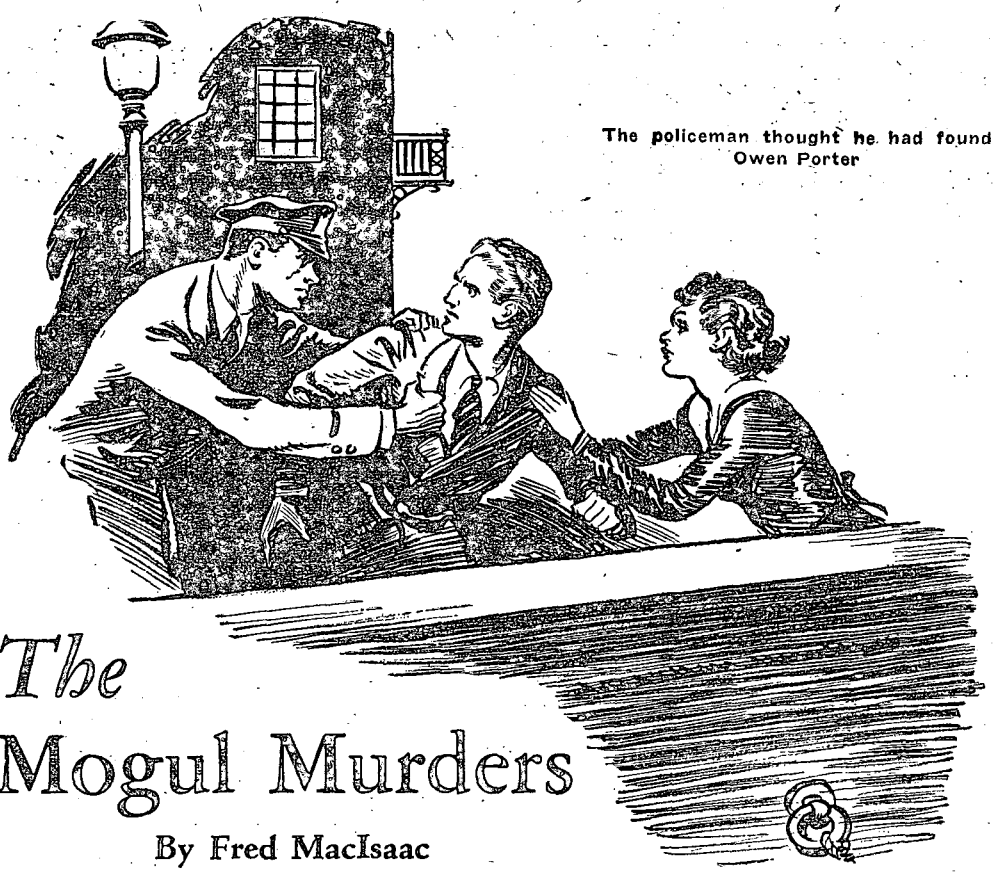

The policeman thought he had found Owen Porter

The Mogul Murders

By Fred MacIsaac

What has happened—

MURDER in high places! New York was astounded to read one morning in its newspapers that Harleigh Porter, president of the Porter Supersteel Corporation, had been found shot to death in his private office. All evidence of guilt pointed to the young playboy, Owen Porter, heir to the Porter millions, who had been the last person seen to enter his uncle's office. Many people positively identified him, and his revolver found with one chamber empty in his hotel room, made things look bad for Owen.

But it happened that Owen Porter really had nothing to do with his uncle's murder. He had been framed—neatly. Lured to a Fifty-fourth Street apartment by an enticing, glamorous woman, he had been kept occupied while some one impersonated him and called with murderous intent at the Supersteel Company office.

Owen goes to his best friend, Frank Westerly, a writer of crime mysteries, for advice and help. Owen denies all guilt of the murder, and convinces Frank that he is innocent. Frank immediately starts an investigation of his own, and calls on John Gammon, vice-president of the Porter Company. Frank enlists Gammon's aid to

Frank Westerly Carries on His Grim Fight Against Power and Influence in High Places to Prove That His Best Friend, Owen Porter, Is Not the Murderer That All New York Thinks He Is

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track down the real killer. After a fruitless day, Frank returns to his room, where he is overpowered by two unknown thugs, who had been waiting for him.

Frank is nearly overpowered by the two thugs, when suddenly they are surprised by the appearance of two cops, who had been summoned by Annabel Platt, Frank's girl-friend, who lives at the same rooming house. The two policemen are shot and killed by the escaping thugs who vanish into the night.

Meanwhile Owen Porter gets a job as a dishwasher in a third-rate restaurant. One evening he meets a charming Irish girl, Mary Breen, whose uncle, McGonnigle, owns a bar. They are attracted to each other, and though she recognizes who he is, she does not turn him in, believing that he is innocent.

Gammon and Westerly confer with Arthur Sturgis, commissioner of police, who try to map out a plan of procedure. Frank defends the character of his friend. Through his literary agent, Dick Turner, and by good fortune, Frank makes the acquaintance of a ravishing girl by the name of Lola Hastings. They strike up their acquaintance at a bar, where Frank learns that she is going to Montreal by train. Since she is identical with the description of the girl who had lured Owen to the Fifty-fourth Street apartment, he decides to shadow her to Montreal. He buys a compartment on the same train as hers. They have dinner together; and later they retire to his compartment for a game of bridge. Two thugs named Walter Smith and Jack Savage make up the foursome. While the train is passing somewhere along Lake Champlain, the two toughs suddenly knock out Frank and toss him through the train window.

CHAPTER XV

The Canoe

AT the end of an hour Lola and the two thugs left the compartment one by one. They did not encounter the porter. Presently the porter, knocked, entered, saw the evidences of revelry, chuckled and made up the berth. The weakness in the hastily conducted plan of the man called Tony was that the porter might have observed that Westerly's suitcase was gone from the compartment. But he did not observe it until morning when he saw that the berth had not been occupied.

By that time all the passengers had departed from the train. He thought nothing about the matter at all.

Lola Hastings and her friends, Tony and Jack, left the train separately. Lola drove to an address which had been supplied her which happened to be a high-class lodging house in the French quarter.

A canoe floated motionlessly beneath the railroad trestle on Lake Champlain. It was motionless because a young man grasped one of the supports of the trestle with his left hand while his right arm was about the slim waist of the girl who reclined beside him upon the cushions. It was dark beneath the trestle but a passing train, brightly lighted, threw radiance upon the glassy surface of the lake beyond.

There were other canoes visible because of Chinese lanterns. Several small phonographs tinkled forth the most recent popular songs. This part of the lake was popular with canoeists.

These lovers who sought the shadow of the railroad bridge had kissed and their lips had separated when the girl gave a scream. A human form had hurtled down from the high bridge. With a heavy splash it struck the water and vanished.

"A man fell from the train," she exclaimed. The canoe was already moving forward, responding to a quick stroke of the paddle which the youth had seized.

In a few seconds the canoe passed over the spot where the body had hit the water. And, as the two young

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people strained their eyes; the train had carried away the illumination upon the water—something broke the surface a few feet away.

"This way," called the young man. But the body was sinking again. Without hesitation the youth dove from the canoe and overtook the sinking body with a couple of strokes. He drew it to the surface. He spoke, shook his burden but the head hung limply.

"Dead or unconscious," called the rescuer. "Jane, I'll hold on to the stern of the canoe. We can't get him into it without tipping it. Paddle us to the boat house."

Frank Westerly, whose last recollection was standing with his back to his criminal visitors, came back to consciousnes laying upon a wicker couch in a locker room of a Boat and Canoe Club on Lake Champlain. His head hurt, he was badly shaken up and terribly bewildered, but otherwise uninjured.

Jack, the man with the blackjack, had hit him just hard enough to make it impossible for him to help himself when he struck the water. Tony had hoped that it would be assumed that Westerly, had been a victim of accidental drowning.

HE saw two young people smiling down at him, a very pretty girl of seventeen or eighteen and a manly-looking blonde youth who grinned at him cheerfully. The youth, a Columbia student, was Henry Hart.

"You must have fallen off the Montreal Express," said this chap. "How could it have happened?"

"I don't know how it happened," Frank replied faintly. "I guess—wait—" he placed his hand upon his breast. The wallet which had been in his breast pocket was gone. "I've been robbed," he continued. "So I must have been slugged and thrown off the train. I—I think somebody must have come up behind me."

"And opened one of the vestibule doors," suggested the girl.

"I've a car outside," said Henry Hart, eagerly. "I'll help you walk to it, sir. We're about the same size. I can give you dry clothes."

"You're wet," exclaimed Frank. He managed to sit up.

"Henry dove in after you," exclaimed the young woman proudly. "He saved your life."

Frank offered his hand. "Thanks very much, both of you," he said from the heart. "I've no doubt I'd have drowned. I don't remember the train crossing a bridge. It's all rather vague." Which was not true, but he saw no reason to explain the how and why of his plunge to near death.

With the young vacationists supporting him, he walked to their parked car and rode with them to the Piney House, a small hotel where both were staying. Hart's garments fitted him a bit snugly but he was appreciative of them. He asked the time. It was nearly midnight.

He went through his pockets. Perhaps they had left him some change. He found about a dollar's worth and an envelope addressed to Miss Annabel Platt. He eyed it in dismay; it was a note he had scribbled telling Annabel he was taking the Montreal train. In his haste to catch the train and in his rather befuddled condition, he had forgotten to push it under the door of her apartment.

"I think I had better take a room here for the night," he said slowly. "I have no cash but the management can wire my bank in New York and be assured that my checks are good."

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Won't be necessary, sir. I can advance you money for your room and train fare to Montreal," said the most obliging young Mr. Hart.

Frank smiled wryly. "I don't think I have any business in Montreal now. I'll go back to New York by a morning train. I'm pretty well used up. I had better get to bed."

CHAPTER XVI

The Hand of the Law

THE day following Frank Westerly's adventure, a young man and young woman were leaning against a cement wall at the end of a street in the East Fifties. It was late afternoon. The East River moved swiftly past. A shadow was cast by the vast steel structure of the Fifty-Ninth Street Bridge.

There were soiled looking tugs chugging up and down the River. Elderly ferryboats and a large white steamer bound for New York were passing.

The girl had red hair and answered to the name of Mary Breen. She had conducted the youth, who said his name was William Owens but whom she was sure was Owen Porter, to this place.

"I come here whenever I can," she said. "It's so wonderful to me. In Ireland we don't see things like this. Look at the busses and automobiles on that bridge. They're small as toys. It means that the bridge is terribly high but it doesn't look high. Why is that?"

"It's so perfectly proportioned. The central span is a hundred fifty or seventy-five feet above the water, I've forgotten."

"It's perfectly grand," she said.

Owen knew he took a great risk in coming here. It was outside the limits of the little bit of Ireland in which he was safe—so far. But Owen was young and Mary was beautiful and incredibly innocent and he had been very unhappy and very lonely. In her company he forgot that the electric chair loomed for him. When he returned to Mike McGonnigle's palace bar the afternoon following this first meeting, the good natured Mike had introduced him to his niece. They had left together and she had led him to her favorite spot.

She listened raptly when Owen confessed he was a dishwasher in a cheap restaurant and she had taken it well.

Suddenly a hand fell upon Owen's shoulder. He was whirled round. A uniformed policeman was scrutinizing him sharply.

"Dan Rafferty," cried Mary, "what do you want with my cousin, Bill?"

The sharp eyes of the officer turned to her. "If it ain't Mike McGonnigle's niece," he exclaimed. "Sure, it done my heart good when I slipped in there the other day to hear you playing 'The Cork Leg' and 'Garry Owen.'"

"Well, let go of Bill, you lunkhead," she commanded. The hand fell from Owen's shoulder and the cop grinned sheepishly.

"I'm coming along," he explained to both, "and I get a glimpse of this laddybuck. Don't get sore, now, Mary. But if it wasn't for your cousin's snozzle, he'd be the spit and image of this Owen Porter and there's promotion waiting for the cop that brings him in."

Mary's eyes flamed. "So it's a murderer, you think he is, my own cousin," she cried fiercely. "If you ever stick your ugly face in Mike's place again, I'll have him break a bottle over your thick skull."

The cop grinned at Owen. "That's the Irish in her," he explained, "and

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the red hair. A policeman has to do what he thinks is his duty. What's Bill's last name, Mary?"

"Breen, and what do you think of that," she snapped.

"Oh, your cousin on your father's side. Well, give my regards to Mike."

He strolled off twirling his club. Owen had not spoken a word—he fortunately had not been given the opportunity. Fourteen thousand policemen, each with a complete description of him, each patrolling his beat with a sharp eye out for the "Wanted Man." This fellow would have taken him in, broken nose or not if it hadn't been for Mary. Mary had insisted he was her cousin, had given him the name of Breen? Why had she done it?

"L-l-let's go," he said unsteadily. Cold sweat was breaking out all over his body.

"No, no, we stay right here for at least five minutes," she said imperiously. "Keep looking down at the river. Oh, you poor boy!"

He eyed her furtively—"You think—you know—"

"Oh, sure, I figured out that you were Owen Porter after I left you yesterday. There was a fine picture of you in the paper."

"But—but I'm wanted for murder," he said feebly.

She laid her small white hand on his right arm. "And so has many another poor fellow who is innocent. And many an innocent man have they hung, especially in Ireland."

"I—I don't know what to say." His eyes were full of tears.

Mary smiled at him tremulously. "We Irish are queer, I suppose. We have been misruled so long that we despise the law. The man on the run has all our sympathy. If he is guilty, we assume he was justified. We assume he is innocent, even after they've convicted him. We give asylum to refugees and ask no questions."

He smiled gratefully. "I never met any girl like you and I don't suppose there are any more like you. If I'd met you a year or two ago I would have been a different man. I've been pretty wild, Mary. I had too much money and no check on me. I played with the wrong kind of women. I've done lots of things that I'm ashamed of, but I swear to you that I didn't kill my uncle."

"OH, sure and I believe you," she declared firmly. "I knew there wasn't a bit of harm in you, when I took my first look at you in the bar yesterday. We must never come here again. This is Dan's beat. He lives on the same street with my folks. You mustn't come into the bar again. Uncle Mike could use the reward offered for you. Owen, if you're innocent, why don't you prove it?"

"I'm ashamed to tell you why, Mary. There's a girl in it."

"Tell me," she commanded. And he told her.

"But they can find her, if they hunt hard," she declared. "You ought to inform the police, but how can you?"

"Nobody would believe my story except one good friend." He told her about his visit to Frank Westerly.

"Get him to go to the police," she said shrewdly.

"And admit that he saw and talked with me? They'd jug him."

"Westerly, I heard that name. Is he an author?"

"Yes."

"There was a piece in the paper yesterday or the day before. Two burglars got into his apartment. A girl heard a racket in his rooms and called

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the police. Two officers rushed in, the burglars shot them dead and escaped."

"Was Westerly hurt?" he asked anxiously. "I didn't see that article."

"He was beaten up, the paper said."

"If I could only see and talk to him," said Owen. "I wonder if they were burglars—did it have anything to do with my trouble? Of course, it couldn't."

"I could see him for you," suggested Mary. "Owen, have you any idea why your uncle was killed?"

He shook his head.

"Since you didn't do it, it was somebody that not only wanted your uncle to die but wanted you out of the way. Somebody who would profit greatly by getting rid of the two of you. Some of your relatives, maybe."

"But that's impossible."

"It's impossible that you could be calling on this girl and at the same time be killing your uncle miles away," she said shrewdly. "But it happened."

"My relatives are a lot of hicks in the middle west. And I never knew anything about my uncle's affairs. I'm as puzzled as anybody."

"You go back to your dishwashing and stick close to your room. I have to think up some way to make Uncle Mike say I have a cousin named Bill Breen if Rafferty goes in and asks him."

"I'll vamoose," he said grimly. "I won't let you get entangled in this you —you angel."

"'Tis a positive talent of the Breens to forget to mind their own business. I'm so sorry for you, Owen. Let's go, now."

AFTER leaving Owen outside the Palamar, Mary walked swiftly to McGonnigle's Palace Bar. Mike was mopping up the bar and there were no customers in the place.

"Uncle Mike, if Dan Rafferty, the cop, comes in and asks if I have a cousin named Bill Breen, you tell him I have," Mary said directly.

"But it's a blasted lie," he protested. "You have not."

"I have or I'll go into Minsky's Burlesque—as a strip woman."

He glared at her. "Bad cess to yer, you wouldn't do that. Is it this feller that in interdooced to you today because you insisted?"

She knew how Rafferty would work it, assuming he had any lingering notion that it was Owen Porter he had encountered with Miss Breen. He would say, "I met Mary Breen and her cousin Bill, today, Mike." And he would watch Mike's reaction sharply. Having been warned, Mike would say, "Oh, him? A fine broth of a boy." Or something like that. And Rafferty would then be ashamed to admit that he had mistaken a relative of Mike McGonnigle for a murderer. She felt pretty sure that Rafferty had been convinced and wouldn't question her Uncle but she couldn't take a chance.

At seven o'clock, Mary Breen, wearing a demure dress of black crêpe with a wide white collar entered the lobby of the Bekhart Hotel and relieved one of the day operators at the long telephone switchboard of that vast caravansary. When Mary had landed penniless in New York she was aware of her vast debt to Uncle Mike McGonnigle, and eager to become self-supporting.

If America had not been in the throes of the Depression, even Uncle Mike's willingness to pay the passage of his niece would not have availed. But the Irish Immigrant quota was not filled because it was well known in Ireland that there were no jobs to be ob-

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tained any more in America and Mary had no trouble in getting aboard a ship and crossing the ocean.

Upon her second day in America, Mary had presented herself at the Telephone Company's training-school the existence of which a neighbor of Uncle Mike's had informed her. It is unlikely that she would have been taken on except for her Dublin accent. It is a remarkable fact that the clearest, most pure diction of the English speaking world is that of the well-bred people of Dublin, Ireland. The Dublin accents lacks the excessive inflection of the English and the flat monotony of the American. A few words with Mary and she had been enrolled in the school. A few weeks' training and she had been given a fairly well-paying job on the Bekhart switchboard.

Mary worked from seven P.M. until three A.M. at the Hotel switchboard. It was a busy switchboard until after one A.M. and then the job became tedious. Like the other girls, Mary amused herself by listening in, especially to long distance calls which were often exciting.

Tonight she thought a lot about Owen Porter who had lived in the luxury and elegance of this great hotel and who now slept in the squalid Palamar and washed dishes in its awful kitchen from six P.M. until four A.M. How dreadful it must all be to him, she thought. A boy who has had everything in the world his heart desired and suddenly was a fugitive from justice and a drudge in a bad smelling dive like the Palamar.

The time passes rapidly when one is busy and Mary was kept rather busy until after one A.M. At about one-fifteen a call came in from Chicago for George Graves in room 1125. She made the connection.

"Hello, Graves," said the person in Chicago. "Have they caught Owen Porter yet?"

Mary had not intended to listen but the mention of Owen's name caused her to listen intently.

"Not yet. Police say it's a matter of a few hours."

"Well Gammon talked with Price of Damon Steel today. Price told him frankly he wouldn't wait until Porter was arrested and convicted. He demanded that the deal go through as arranged by Mr. Porter. Gammon said that the Board of Directors couldn't put through a ten million dollar expenditure—the Courts wouldn't allow it—and Price told him frankly that his company was in such shape that it would have to accept Rutherford Steel's offer. Gammon was fit to be tied. Finally got Price to agree to a delay of two weeks. That all right?"

"It won't do Porter Supersteel a bit of good," said Mr. Graves. "It will be months before Owen Porter can be tried and convicted, assuming he is captured within a few days. Porter owns 65 percent of Porter Supersteel—Gammon's hands are tied." He laughed unpleasantly. "Looks like everything was all right, eh?"

"Sure does. Well, good night."

The man in Chicago hung up. Mary knit her alabaster brow trying to make sense out of this cryptic conversation. It concerned Owen, so it was tremendously important, but what did it mean. She took a slip of paper and wrote down as much of the conversation as she could remember. Price of Damon Steel, Gammon, whoever he was, Rutherford Steel. The fact that Owen owned 65 percent of the Porter Supersteel Company seemed to tie this Mr. Gammon's hands and Mr. Graves approved of the situation. She shud-

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dered at the callous way in which they discussed the conviction for murder of poor Owen Porter. She would have to see Owen and ask him if he understood what the two men were talking about.

CHAPTER XVII

Mary Makes a Call

AT six o'clock the following evening, Frank Westerly was sitting in his living room staring blankly at a sheet of paper in his typewriter. At Lake Champlain he had had the hotel phone his bank after which the manager had cashed his check. He was accompanied to the train for New York by the sweet young couple who were responsible for his still being in the land of the living, and he had arrived in New York early in the afternoon.

He had phoned Annabel Platt who again had refused to speak to him. His door was open now and he was unable to put words on paper because he was listening intently for the sound of Annabel's door on the floor below opening and closing. She was late. She usually came home before six o'clock. He would have to do a lot of explaining to Annabel. He didn't blame her for being sore at him.

There was a light step on the stairs. He stiffened. He smiled eagerly. Annabel—she was coming up!

There was a light knock on his half-open door. "Come in," he called joyfully.

But it wasn't Annabel. There entered the room one of the loveliest girls he had ever seen. Thick dark red curls from beneath a small black hat, a flawless figure in a black crepe costume with a white collar. A gorgeous complexion, the whitest skin he had ever seen and a charming smile.

"I'm hoping I'm not intruding," said Mary Breen in her sweet sibilent tones.

"The pleasure is mine," he declared. "But isn't there a mistake? My name is Frank Westerly. You don't want to see me."

"But you're the very person I do wish to see," she assured him. "I found the front door unlocked. I saw your apartment number on the name plates below and I came up. My name is Mary Breen."

He gazed at her sharply. Was this another ruse of the people who had made two attempts to murder him? But nobody could gaze into the bright blue eyes of Mary and remain suspicious.

"Please sit down," he said. He had already risen. "What can I do for you, Miss Breen?"

"May I close the door?"

He walked over and closed it and Mary seated herself on the edge of a chair.

"You are a friend of Owen Porter," she said in a low tone. He stiffened and again regarded her suspiciously. Mary smiled. "Oh, I know, he told me how you gave him money—"

"You've seen him? Where is he?" he exclaimed.

"I haven't been able to find him today. That's why I came to you. I'm horribly worried about him, Mr. Westerly."

"Are you an old friend of his?" he asked. She shook her head. "I never met him until a couple of days ago. He's innocent, isn't he, Mr. Westerly?"

"You bet your life he is."

The phone rang. Frank excused himself and answered it. It was Annabel.

"If you have anything to say to me," she said in tones like ice, "come right down and say it."

"I can explain," he assured her.

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"But I'm—er engaged at the moment. In ten minutes—eh?"

Click! Miss Platt had hung up on him. Looking distressed, he replaced his receiver on the hook and met the cool clear blue eyes of the Irish girl.

"Your young lady?" she asked. He nodded sheepishly.

"Well, I'll be getting out of your way in a few minutes. Can't anything be done for Owen, sir?"

"I'M devoting all my energies to clear him. I've made some progress. I am very anxious to see him. He can tell me a number of things I need to know. Where is he?"

"He didn't want you to know where he was because he didn't want to involve you in his trouble."

Frank laughed mirthlessly. "I'm in—up to my neck. Where is he?"

"He was working as a dish washer in the Hotel Palamar on Second Avenue, but he's gone."

"Gone! Has he been arrested?"

She shook her head. "He was discharged last night—a fight of some sort. He left no address at all, at all."

He gazed at her through half-closed eyes. "How much do you know of his story?"

"How they lured him to a house on Fifty-fourth Street while his uncle was murdered. I think he told me everything."

"And I think you can be trusted," he said heartily. "If you see him, tell him not to come here. The Police Commissioner knows he visisted me once and he is having this place watched in hope he comes again. Maybe my phone is tapped. Arrange with him to meet me somewhere and you come and tell me personally. Will you do that?"

"Sure and I will," she declared. "But where is he?"

"If I were Owen I certainly wouldn't lose you," he said admiringly. "If you see him, tell him that I have proof of his story about the apartment on Fifty-fourth Street. I know who the woman was. I've talked with her—I know where she is now. I know—" he paused, looked startled and clasped his hands together. It had come over him now.

The dark man in the compartment who had had him tossed through the train window, he knew where he had seen him. He was the person who occupied the ground floor apartment in East Fifty-fourth St.

"I know two of the people concerned in the frame-up. Tell Owen to keep a stiff upper lip. I'm going to clear him of this charge."

To his astonishment, Mary grasped his right hand and kissed it.

"God bless you, Mr. Westerly," she exclaimed. Tears were streaming from her pretty eyes and coursing down her lovely cheeks innocent of rouge and powder. "I'll tell him—if I see him," she declared. "Now Mr. Westerly, do you know a man named Graves?"

"Graves? No-o. Yes. He's the chief auditor at Porter Supersteel. Why? What about him?

"I'm a night operator at the Bekhart Hotel and I have to go now or I'll be late. Mr. Graves lives there. Last night he had a call from Chicago.

"From Gammon?"

"No, but a man named Gammon was mentioned."

"Tell me what was said," he exclaimed excitedly.

She was fumbling in her handbag. "I wrote it down as well as I could remember it. I listened in because the first question the man in Chicago asked Mr. Graves was this, 'Have they caught Owen Porter yet?' Here is

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what I wrote down. She read it, her brow furrowed because it had no meaning to her. Do you understand it?" she asked anxiously.

"There's a ten million dollar deal pending," he said slowly. "Supersteel apparently was going to buy Damon Steel and can't at present, because Mr. Porter was murdered and his sole heir is in hiding and can't give his consent. If Owen is arrested on the charge of murdering his uncle, his consent would be worthless because he may forfeit the estate, if convicted, but the next of kin won't inherit until Owen actually is convicted."

"It sounds like just a lot of words," she said, bewildered.

"So Damon Steel is going to take an offer from Rutherford Steel. Ten millions involved."

"But what has it to do with Owen?" she demanded.

"I don't know—yet. This Graves—Gammon kicks him around, calls him names, yet Graves is phoned long distance and told how a business conference out there with Gammon turned out. Miss Breen, I can't thank you enough. This may be very important. You like Owen, don't you?"

She nodded.

Mary laughed gaily. "Sure, it's I that should be telling you that," she declared. "I'm giving you my address in case you find Owen before I do. Good night to you, sir."

CHAPTER XVIII

Jealous Woman

MARY was so uplifted by her interview with Owen's friend that she was humming a little tune as she descended the stairs. "It was a very gay melody of Thomas Moore's called "The Young May Moon." This Mr. Westerly was very clever and he was going to clear Owen. Everything was going to be all right.

A door on the floor below opened, a girl stepped out, a very small, pretty brunette who was dressed for the street. However, she stared very hard at Mary, stepped back into her apartment and slammed the door. Mary thought no more of that but reached the street and walked briskly toward the Bekhart and her job.

But inside her door, Annabel was trembling with wrath. "So," she muttered. "So, that's why he couldn't come right down. Entertaining that red-headed woman. And she's terribly pretty. That's why he broke his date last night. Well, this time, I'm through with him."

There is an old saying, "Small pots are soon hot." Annabel Platt had a temper as Frank very well knew. She was also adorable and delectable and he liked her high spirit. Giving the red-headed girl time to get out of the building she hastened to depart herself. And when Frank, a few minutes later, knocked on her door, there was no answer.

Annabel walked to Fifth Avenue. She walked to a very swank hotel and into the lounge. She sat at a little table and ordered a cocktail. Annabel rarely drank a cocktail, but she was through with Frank Westerly forever and she needed something to comfort her.

This hotel has a charming lounge for ladies, beyond which is a very ornate bar. As she sat at her table, a young man walked through the lounge and into the bar. Annabel's keen black eyes inspected him. They grew even more keen. She grew white. She looked anxiously around. The young man was standing against the bar.

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Annabel rose and went into the lobby.

"Get me the house detective," she commanded excitedly. "Very important, quick."

A bellboy hastened to do her bidding and a moment later a heavy-set man with a bulldog countenance returned with the bellboy.

"I'm the house detective, Miss," he said with what he thought was a polite smile. "Anything I can do for you?"

"Would you like to arrest Owen Porter, the murderer?" she demanded.

"Would I? Where is he?"

"Come with me."

She led him into the lounge and pointed. The detective stared and whistled. "Certainly looks like him. God, what a nerve he's got! How do you know its him?"

"I am Miss Annabel Platt, secretary to the late Harleigh Porter," she informed him.

A heavenly light appeared in the eyes of the house detective. Ten grand reward! Of course he'd have to split it with this woman but five grand was a lot of money.

A heavy hand descended upon the man at the bar. "Owen Porter, you're under arrest," he declared.

"I'm not Owen Porter. You can't arrest me," blustered the youth. But the detective's revolver was pressed against his side.

"Come quietly," he snarled. With a shrug the young man surrendered.

There were very few people in the place, the conversation was low voiced and little attention was created. The detective led his prisoner to Annabel.

"Sure this is the man?" he asked once more.

"Positive," said Annabel, thin-lipped.

"Take a taxi and follow mine to the Station House," commanded the detective. "I'll book him on your identification."

"I've never seen this woman in my life," protested the prisoner.

"Oh, yes you have," declared Annabel firmly and contemptuously.

She arrived at the Station House as the house detective led his prisoner to the desk.

"Here's Owen Porter for you, Lieutenant," he said complacently. "And here's Harleigh Porter's secretary to identify him. Me and her claim the reward."

"BY Golly, it's him!" exclaimed the lieutenant. Several officers crowded forward. The prisoner protested loudly. He had just reached New York. He could prove his identity. He was unheeded. Annabel's identification was not required. The prisoner was hustled to the cells, Annabel's address was taken and she was allowed to depart.

"Get the Commissioner at his home," commanded the lieutenant.

Annabel Platt departed in a state of utter funk. All her fury had left her. She was petrified at the thing she had done. Frank Westerly would never, never forgive her. What if he had had a red-headed woman in his rooms? Maybe he could have explained. Frank believed Owen innocent. Maybe he was innocent. She had half-believed it herself until she had got mad with Frank.

Ten minutes later somebody knocked at Frank's door. He opened to see a pale, frightened, horribly despondent Annabel Platt.

"What's the matter, dear?" he asked anxiously. "I went down and knocked at your apartment, but you had gone out." With a wail of mortal woe Annabel threw herself into his

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arms, then violently pushed him away, rushed to the couch, threw herself downward upon it and proceeded to have a mild case of hysterics.

Frank hovered around in dire distress but after a few minutes she sat up.

"You'll hate me forever," she said. "I've done the most despicable thing. I wouldn't blame you if you k-killed me."

"What is the matter, Annabel?"

"You had that girl in your rooms. I left here absolutely furious. I went into the Golden Hotel and I saw Owen Porter. I called the house detective and had him arrested. He is in a cell at the Station House. I'll go, now. I—I wish I hadn't done it."

Frank was gazing at her with horror. His face was ashen. "All right, go!" he said.

Annabel walked stiffly out of the room and descended the stairs. Frank dropped into a chair. His face was working with pain. He must have sat there like a graven image for half an hour when the doorbell from the street rang. He rose and pressed the buzzer. He heard heavy steps on the stairs, opened the door and saw, with astonishment, Police Commissioner Sturgis in person.

"I rang Miss Platt's bell," he said testily. "She didn't answer. Have you seen her?"

"Oh, yes," Frank said bitterly. "I've seen her. She turned Owen Porter in."

The Commissioner seated himself. "The message reached me as I was entering my house," he said. "I rushed to the Station. Miss Platt is mistaken. It's not Owen Porter."

"What?" Frank was on his feet. His satisfaction with the failure of the police to have arrested the wrong man was obvious and comical. "I'll be back in a minute, Commissioner." He ran down to the floor below and pounded on Annabel's door.

"Open up, Annabel," he commanded.

"I won't," came faintly from inside. "I'll never see you again."

"It's not Owen, dear," he called. "Everything's all right."

He heard feet patting the floor within. The door opened and a lovely, tear-stained face appeared.

"It must be. I know," she declared dubiously.

"The Police Commissioner is upstairs. He says a mistake was made. Come on up."

"I—I'm so glad," she murmured.

THEY entered and Sturgis gazed at the girl sternly. "The man you accused of being Owen Porter is not Owen Porter, Miss Platt," he stated. "I am unable to understand how you made such an error. You are the chief witness for the state in the case of the murder of Harleigh Porter and you make a mistake like this."

"How do you know it isn't Owen Porter?" she asked sullenly.

"This man is Howard Porter, a cousin of Owen's. He arrived in New York today in company with Mr. Gammon who brought him from Chicago. He represents the three Porter relatives who will inherit the estate, if Owen is convicted of the murder. There is a certain family resemblance but it wouldn't fool anybody who had the opportunity of knowing Owen Porter as you did."

Annabel dropped her eyes on the floor, suddenly raised them and stared hard at the Commissioner. "Perhaps I was mistaken in accusing him of being Owen Porter," she said slowly.

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"I should have accused him of being the man who went into Harleigh Porter office a few minutes before he was killed. I had a good look at that man. I knew him instantly."

"You are still mistaken," Sturgis said coldly. "Howard Porter was in Chicago when the murder was committed. You would be a bad witness for the State if the defense lawyers were aware of your uncertainty."

"And they'll be aware of it," said Westerly grimly. "Leave that to me. I demand you hold this fellow. You already, on Miss Platt's statement, have more evidence against him than against Owen Porter."

Sturgis smiled. "He has been released and has returned to his hotel. However, an eye will be kept upon him."

"Here is the man who would benefit if Harleigh were killed and Owen convicted of his murder; he comes into the Porter millions."

"That's the man who went into Mr. Porter's office," reiterated Annabel. "Of course, I thought it was Owen. He'd telephoned. I hadn't seen him for a couple of years and then only once, at a distance. Naturally I assumed he was Owen. No doubt, he counted on that."

"We'll continue to look for Owen Porter," said Sturgis to Frank. "I presume you expect me to believe that Howard Porter constructed the frame-up—the apartment on East 54th Street—to hold Owen while Howard committed the crime."

"I don't accuse this man whom I've never seen, but he has a better motive than Owen. Owen had no motive. And, Mr. Commissioner, I have found the woman who lured Owen to that apartment. Her name is Lola Hastings. She left for Montreal last night. I was on the train with her. I was going to find out where she went in Montreal."

"Indeed. Have you her address?"

"No," admitted Frank. "I was slugged and thrown off the Montreal Express while it was crossing a trestle over Lake Champlain. Two attempts have been made on my life since I started out to prove Owen's innocence."

"You stand the experience very well," said the Commissioner. "You are a very good writer of fiction, I believe, Mr. Westerly."

"So you went to Montreal last night!" exclaimed Annabel. "Oh, Frank, if you had let me know."

"Did this Miss Hastings admit to you that she entertained Owen in that apartment?" asked Sturgis.

"No, but I have a reputable witness who saw her talking to him in the Bekhart bar the night before. He is Dick Turner, my literary agent."

"You are making progress," the Commissioner observed. "Mr. Westerly, this whole tale of yours is worthless, because it's something you claim that Owen Porter told you. If Porter will give himself up, state his alleged experience with this Miss Hastings, then your corroboration will be important. I assure you we wish to find the murderer—if not Owen, the real murderer.

"I HAVE two witnesses to my being thrown off the Montreal express, a young man and woman who pulled me out of the water. And may I remind you that two of your patrolmen were killed in this room when they attempted to rescue me from two thugs who were trying to murder me. Those are facts."

"But not necessarily related to the

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murder of Porter. Young man, we have only your unsupported word that there is a connection."

Frank lost his temper with this, cold, imperturbable official.

"What is your regular business, Mr. Sturgis?" he asked harshly.

"I am a banker."

"Then go back to banking. As a criminal investigator, you're a washout." Sturgis rose.

"If I were a typical police official," he said, "I'd have you in jail charged with being an accessory after the fact of the murder of Harleigh Porter. I am leaving you at large in the hope that your loyal efforts to help your friend will shed light upon a number of puzzling things in this case. At present, we have enough proof that Owen Porter killed his uncle—"

"Oh, have you?" shouted the still indignant Westerly. "You have not. Since Miss Annabel Platt, your chief witness, is confident that the man she turned in tonight was the person purporting to be Owen who visited Harleigh Porter, she can go on the stand and swear that the real Owen Porter is not the murderer. And what happens to your case then, Mr. Commissioner?"

"We have persons to identify Owen Porter less unstable than Miss Platt," replied the Commissioner. "Now I've had enough of your insolence young man. Go right ahead. Produce Owen. Let him identify this Lola Hastings. No doubt Porter talked with several girls the night before the murder, talking with girls in bars seems to have been one of his habits. Miss Platt, will you be at your office in the morning?"

Annabel nodded.

"I'll have men posted outside this building to make sure that you do not leave town. I could lock you up as a material witness. I could lock you both up. But I shall refrain. Good evening."

The two young people gazed at each other without speaking for a moment after his departure.

"Sturgis," said Frank finally, "is not a bad skate. I lost my temper, insulted him and he stood for it. But he has a single track mind."

"Frank," she said solemnly. "If the man I saw in the Golden Hotel isn't Owen Porter, then Owen didn't kill his Uncle. I'm sorry, terribly sorry."

"Be glad," cried Frank gaily. "Your jealousy was responsible for finding somebody who looks like Owen. We had to produce a double to get anywhere with Owen's alibi."

"I WISH I didn't have such a mean temper," the girl said contritely. "I rushed out of the house hating you. I had him arrested because I knew it would hurt you. I didn't realize until too late that I might be sending him to death. I couldn't do that—even to a m-m-murderer—"

She burst into tears. He stroked her thick black hair fondly.

"With all your faults—" he quoted gently.

She looked up at him, smiling anxiously through her tears.

"That red-headed girl was beautiful. Who—why—I suppose it's none of my business."

"Nevertheless, darling, I'll tell you all about her."

By and by Annabel went down to her apartment and Frank seated himself at his typewriter desk and did a little thinking.

A most ingenious plot had been evolved to get Owen out of the way during the fatal hour and to make it impossible to prove his whereabouts during that period.

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CHAPTER XIX

Officer Rafferty Buys News Clothes

PATROLMAN Dan Rafferty on the morning following the return of Frank Westerly from his interrupted trip to Montreal reported at his Precinct House and asked to speak with the Captain. He carried a parcel under his arm.

"What's on your mind, Dan?" asked Captain Joe McNulty. "I got a lot of papers to go through here."

"I got something, Captain, that may be important and maybe not," said the patrolman. "Night before last I went into a pawn shop and bought a suit of clothes. My 'cits' were awful shabby, but my cash was low. Well I saw this suit on a dummy in the window. It looked my size and I know good wool when I see it and the price was eight bucks. Looked like a 'hot' suit to me but what the heck. I went in and tried it on and it fitted me pretty good. I knew it was 'hot' because the tailor's label had been ripped out and it was in swell condition. I took it away with me. I examined it when I got home. I found a label inside the waistband of the pants that the thief had overlooked."

"Get to the point," snapped the Captain. "Look at all these papers I have to sign."

"The tailor's name was Otto Hartman—on East Fifty-seventh Street. That guy charges a hundred fifty for a suit of clothes. The owner might pay a reward of twenty-five bucks to get the suit back. Yesterday was my short day. I took the suit to this tailor and asked him if he could locate the owner. He looks it up in his books—"

The Captain was feeling of the gray material. "Fine English woolen," he asserted.

"Yeh," said Rafferty with a grin. "Well, the tailor comes back with a funny look on his pan. 'I made this suit two years ago,' he said, 'for a young gentleman named Owen Porter.'

"'The one that killed his uncle?' I asks.

"'The one who is accused of the crime. Now you stay right here while I call the Police.'

"'You don't have to,' I told him and I flashed my badge."

"Dan!" cried the captain excitedly. "You got something, darn your hide!"

Dan smiled complacently. "Don't I know it? So I go back to this Cohen, the pawnbroker, and I give him the works. He paid four bucks for the suit to a cheap grifter named Tim Duggin who lives in a flop house called the Palamar—"

"I know the joint."

"I hang around until midnight before Duggin crawls in and then I nab him. He finds this suit in a parcel under the bed of a dishwasher in the hotel café and sold it to Cohen. I can't be bothered with him, then, but go down to the café and ask for this dishwasher. He's been fired the night before. Seems the cook takes a dislike to him and goes at him with a bread knife. And this feller slugs him. Since the boss can get another dishwasher easier than he can a cook, he fires the dishwasher. I get a description. He's about my size and build and blond and answers to the description of this Owen Porter except that his nose is bigger—they claim it's busted. But he's flown the coop."

"How long has he been there?" demanded the Captain excitedly.

"That checks. He drifted in and asked for a job the night after the murder."

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"You done good work, Dan," said the Captain approvingly. "Go out on your beat. I'll get headquarters. Leave the suit here."

"Seems I'm out eight bucks," sighed Patrolman Dan Rafferty.

"Not if we nab Porter."

DAN RAFFERTY went out to patrol his beat in the quiet Sutton Place district. There was something he hadn't told the Captain.

If he had confessed to the Captain that he laid hands on Owen Porter and let him go, he probably would get chucked off the force. It was that red-headed Mary Breen who was the cause of it.

Mary Breen was the prettiest colleen he had ever set eyes on. He had been trying to be friends with Mary ever since she came to live with the McGonnigles and had been elated when finally he had made her acquaintance. He couldn't contradict that girl when she said this murderer was her cousin. He had never doubted her statement. He had studied Porter's photographs and the fellow had a very fine straight nose.

Mary's cousin had a snozzle.

Dan was not a very bright man but he could add things up and get the right answer. Mary must know who this dishwasher was or she wouldn't have claimed he was her cousin when the Law had its hand on his shoulder. He grinned. Back in Ireland they always covered up fugitives. In Kerry where he came from they had a saying, "'Tis a good man indeed that the Police want to hang." Ireland was like that and the bit of a girl was only a few weeks from the auld sod. In fact his difficulty in getting Mary's good will was chiefly because he was a policeman in a uniform. Dan didn't believe there could be any other reason.

Well, the murderer had got away from the Palamar just in time, but he wouldn't be able to stay away from a girl like Mary Breen. The way to catch Owen Porter was to keep an eye on Mary Breen.

Just before twelve o'clock a drunk was thrown out of a saloon over on First Avenue. He seated himself on the sidewalk and began to sing lustily. The bouncer was suggesting that he get up and go away from the vicinity but the stew continued to sing. Dan chuckled. He had no animosity against drunks, if they were not raising Cain. This one was harmless. The proprietor of the bar came out and called to the approaching officer.

"Arrest this man," he demanded. Dan looked him over. He was not Irish and persons who were not Irish had no right to run saloons in this part of town.

"Sure can't a lad rest himself after drinking your rot-gut?" he asked good naturedly. "Come on, guy, get up and be on your way."

The drunk grinned up at him. He was a well-dressed, agreeable young man. Well educated. "I like it here," he replied. "Tell you what. Sit down beside me, officer, and we'll harmonize. It's early in the day for 'Sweet Adeline,' but how about 'Take My Heart'?"

Good naturedly, Dan lifted him to his feet. It annoyed the young man. He drew himself up and thumped his breast. "Take your hands off me," he commanded pompously. "I'm an American citizen."

For some reason this remark, a common one with stews, always infuriated Dan Rafferty, being a naturalized citizen himself.

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"And what do you think I am?" he roared. "An Ethiopian?"

With that he grasped the tactless youth by the collar and rushed him to the nearest patrol box. He was no longer angry but he had had an inspiration. A chance to talk to the captain. A plan had come into his mind.

The drunken young man gave his name as Dick Turner and asked that one Frank Westerly at a certain address be informed of his plight.

"I been doing the town," he explained to the desk sergeant. "East side, West side, all around the town," which is a quotation from a once popular song called—what's it called—"

"Ask Al Smith," replied the Desk Sergeant. "Lock this bird up and don't rough him, boys. He'll be all right and I'll phone to this friend of his myself. Go back to your beat, Rafferty."

"I'd like a word with the Captain."

THE Sergeant thumbed toward the private office. "He's alone. Go in." The captain greeted him cordially. "My report stirred things up downtown," he said. "They sent up for the suit of clothes. You'll be commended for the work you did on your own time, Dan."

"Captain, it came over me that I had a squint at this dishwasher one night when I got a mug of coffee in the Palamar. I'd know him anywhere. Will you give me three days off without pay. I'll pick him up."

The captain looked thoughtful. "He's hit for another part of town," he objected.

"Maybe not. He doesn't know we identified him by the suit of clothes."

"All right, Dan," declared the Captain. "I'll send a reserve man out on your beat. Good luck to you."

Frank Westerly received the call from the Precinct where Dick Turner was in duress. The hour was twelve-thirty.

Frank permitted himself a smile at the predicament of his agent. It was what might be expected of Dick Turner when he started out to drink up all the liquor in New York. He was in no hurry to answer the summons. The longer Dick remained in a cell the more sober he would get and the sooner he would be back at his desk, looking after the interests of Frank Westerly and other clients.

About one o'clock he took a taxi and started for the East Side police station in which Dick was confined. The cab made its way East, held up by red lights at every avenue. It finally turned into Second Avenue and was halted at the corner of Fifty-eighth Street and Second Avenue by another red light. Frank glanced out the window and became aware of a sandwich man who was standing on the curb waiting for the lights to change. He glanced at him casually and at the moment the sandwich man turned his head and Frank knew him.

The man had a German haircut which meant that all the hair was shaved from his skull. His left eye was blackened and almost closed. His nose was an exaggeration but Frank knew him. The fellow stood within two feet of the cab window.

"Owen," called Frank softly. The man threw a frightened glance in the direction from which the voice came.

Just what part has Owen Porter's cousin, Howard, played in this drama of conspiracy and murder? A most ingenious plot has been evolved to make it possible to prove his alibi during the murder of old Harleigh Porter. Was Annabel Platt really mistaken in her identification of Owen at the Supersteel office—and at the bar of the Golden Hotel? Crime marches on—so do not fail to read the next installment—coming to you next week—of this gripping mystery of THE MOGUL MURDERS.

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Civil Service Q & A

By "G-2"

Could You Qualify as—

Police Patrolman	Special Agent (G-Man)
Police Detective	Secret Service Operative
Policewoman	Post Office Inspector
Fingerprint Expert	Customs Patrol
State Trooper	Immigration Patrol
Crime Prevention Investigator	Anti-Narcotic Agent
Probation Officer	Parole Investigator
Criminologist	Prison Keeper
Police Radio Expert	Internal Revenue Agent
	Alcohol Tax Agent

This department will give you every week typical questions asked in civil service examinations.

Vocabulary Tests

ABILITY to speak and write intelligently, and to choose the right word from among words which seem to express the same meaning, is judged in civil service examinations by what is known as the vocabulary test. These tests are becoming more common in all written examinations due to a belief among examiners that the vocabulary of an average applicant is not up to the standard which is required. It is one examiner's opinion that some of the best applicants are short of correct speech though long on technical knowledge with the result that persons who cannot write a good letter or speak intelligently get into public service and make poor impressions upon their fellow workers and the public.

"Generally speaking," this examiner told the writer, "nine-tenths of the persons who take civil service tests of the written variety make woefully bad marks in the vocabulary tests. It is really amazing how few words are in the average working vocabulary."

Readers may disagree with this pronouncement, but here is an opportunity to determine the accuracy of that examiner's statement. The Vocabulary Test given below has seen service in many written examinations for positions from clerk to high school teacher. The last time it was given 400 applicants took it. Only 80 succeeded in attaining grades above 40. They were persons with high school educations. Previously the test was given to applicants who had finished the grammar grades and had not gone to high school. Of these 250 applicants, 120 attained grades of 40 or better. All of which goes to show that vocabulary is not always a matter of education.

There are forty-five questions in the test. To pass you must correctly answer not less than twenty-five. The time limit is 90 minutes, and, of course, you may not consult a dictionary or other book during the actual examination. Model answers will be found at the conclusion of the test. You are not bound by these model answers. Your own may be as good or better; the point is, you must correctly employ the words given.

A—Compose and write a sentence in which you clearly and correctly convey the meaning of each of these words:

1—clement	5—portentous
2—increment	6—excoriate
3—apathetic	7—dicker
4—captious	8—tenets

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9—restive
10—sententious
11—bloc
12—redolent
13—impending
14—discomfiture
15—edification
16—paragon
17—paramount
18—mentor
19—blandishments
20—charlatan
21—recrimination
22—ephemeral
23—perfunctory
24—unconscionable
25—indigenous
26—rationalize
27—inscrutable
28—paraphrase
29—querulous
30—virtuosity
31—verisimilitude
32—simulate
33—imbued
34—meretricious
35—temerity
36—temerarious
37—deprecate
38—indigent
39—martinet
40—venial

B—Compose and write a sentence using in each both words as numbered, using them in such a way as to clearly show the difference in their meanings:

41—uninterested—disinterested
42—coherent—inherent
43—revise—devise
44—exalt—exult
45—stimulus—stimulant

Model Answers. (The answers here given were accepted as fully and correctly complying with the requirements).

A—1—The weather was clement and only light clothing was worn.

2—A yearly raise in salary is often called one increment.

3—When you have no interest in a subject under discussion you are apathetic.

4—A captious person is one who criticizes on unreasonable and petty grounds and loses sight of something important.

5—The mobilization of armies is a portentous event.

6—In addressing a jury in behalf of his client a lawyer frequently will excoriate witnesses against his client.

7—After a long dicker over the price, the farmer sold his apples at a good figure.

8—Freedom to worship and freedom of thought are basic tenets in civilized forms of society.

9—A spirited horse will grow restive if kept too long in a stall.

10—Pompous individuals usually indulge in a sententious style of speech.

11—The Farmer-Labor bloc in the U. S. Senate prevented passage of the bill.

12—June gardens are redolent of perfume.

13—China is mustering its forces for an impending conflict with Japan.

14—Her red face plainly indicated her discomfiture.

15—Libraries greatly contribute to the edification of humanity.

16—Joan of Arc was a paragon of virtue whom few women have successfully emulated.

17—A world monetary system is an issue of paramount importance to the peace of the world.

18—The boy looked up to the old gentleman as his mentor.

19—The flirtatious blonde young woman tried all her blandishments on him but he was utterly unmoved.

20—He was not a doctor but a charlatan engaged in selling a worthless concoction as a cure.

21—His speech against the judge was laden with bitter recrimination.

22—The life of a butterfly is ephemeral.

23—With too much on her mind she performed her tasks in a perfunctory manner.

24—The unconscionable scoundrel robbed his own mother.

25—Coffee is indigenous to Brazil.

26—She was highly emotional and the teacher found it impossible to rationalize the girl's conduct.

27—A good card player, like the Chinese, is inscrutable.

28—The writer's meaning was much clearer when a paraphrase of his work was read to the class.

29—His failure to come home to dinner on time plunged his wife into a querulous mood.

30—There are only a few violinists who show virtuosity in their playing.

31—There is little verisimilitude in the works of cubist artists.

32—The convict simulated insanity so that he might be taken to the prison hospital.

33—He was imbued with a noble desire to make the world better.

34—The signature on the painting was forged and it was at once pronounced meretricious.

35—The boy had the temerity to shake his fist at the policeman.

36—He was not promoted in the army

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since it was well known that he was addicted to making temerarious decisions.

37—Living along the riverbank, he had good reason to deprecate the effort to pollute the stream.

38—An indigent old person now finds security in old age pensions.

39—Our teacher has become so insistent upon discipline that we all consider her a martinet.

40—The boy's offense was so venial that the judge refused to entertain a complaint against him.

B—41—Unable to understand German he was totally uninterested in the speech. The best witness is a disinterested person who has nothing to gain, nothing to lose, by testifying.

42—He won the debate because he had complete command of his facts and presented them in coherent style. Risk is inherent in aviation.

43—Before sending a manuscript to a printer a revise may be avoided by going over it carefully. It is no simple matter to devise a plan for farm relief.

44—Ethiopians certainly have no reason to exalt the name of Mussolini. It is a display of bad taste and meanness to exult in misfortunes that befall others.

45—Under the right stimulus an ambitious boy may make a great name for himself. Too powerful a stimulant should not be administered to a person who has fainted.

THE Q AND A BOX

Questions pertaining to civil service examinations will be answered without cost. If an individual reply is desired, enclose stamped, addressed envelope.

Thomas A. Fallon, Longview, Wash.—The date upon which the filing period for the federal test for Accounting and Auditing Assistant closed in New York was Sept. 8.

Gerald K. Muth, Lansing, Mich.; Nora Deming, North Adams, Mass., and others.—Your experience in 4-H Club work may help in the Federal test for Associate Extension Home Economist which was announced in late September. Here are the details you requested. Duties of associate extension home economist; to assist State club leaders in organizing and planning county programs of extension work for rural boys and girls, particularly in relation to homemaking activities; to assist in advancing such programs successfully with the aid of organized local leadership; and to assist in further developing and coördinating the home-making phases of 4-H Club work on a national basis. The pay, $3,200 a year. Applicants must not have reached their forty-fifth birthday on Oct. 19, 1936. Education qualifications, completion of a full four-year course leading to a bachelor's degree in a recognized college with major work in home economics. Experience; at least three years of successful experience as county leader, or state or assistant state supervisor, of Boys' or Girls' 4-H Club work; or one year of experience as home demonstration agent may be substituted for one year only of the experience required above. Applicants must be in sound physical health. The examination is unassembled, that is, no written tests will be given. Education and experience will count 70, a thesis by the applicant will rate 30. It is impossible to say when applicants will hear from the Civil Service Commission as to their acceptance or rejection.

H. H. Van Cleef, Chicago.—The job of junior veterinarian, Bureau of Animal Industry, U. S. Department of Agriculture pays $2,000 a year. Age limit 45, height at least five feet four inches. The written tests include theory of practice of veterinary medicine, 30 points; veterinary anatomy, physiology and pathology, and meat inspection, 70 points. A test for this position was announced in September this year. Duties, post mortem and ante mortem inspections of food animals and inspection of food products; administration of tests for disease; control and eradication of disease; sanitary inspection of establishments and plants, and related duties.

Joseph Rossi, San Francisco; Peter Blum, Syracuse, N. Y., and others.—In large cities, rather elaborate and sometimes very technical tests are given for city firemen. Watch this department for a typical fireman test.

Next Week—A Literary Test

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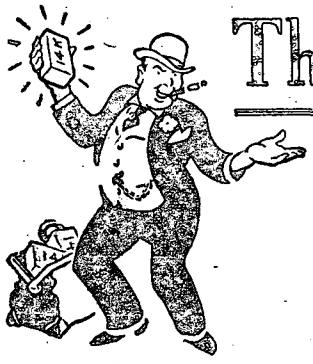

They're Swindling You!

Hearse Chasers

By

Frank Wrentmore

This is the sixty-second of a series of articles exposing business rackets that cost you billions of dollars every year! Mr. Wrentmore is an authority on swindles and frauds, well known to legal, financial and commercial associations.—The Editor.

EARLIER in this series, I sketched rather briefly some of the rackets used by individuals who follow the death notices in the newspapers. They are usually very successful too, because the bereaved relatives generally have no inclination to investigate the circumstances, but accept and pay for C. O. D. packages without question, pay the "balance due" on real estate lots supposedly being purchased by the deceased at the time of his death, and do many other things which make them easy prey for sharpers.

Grief has dulled their natural caution, and unless something occurs to put them on their guard they fall for every scheme—and enrich the schemers. For this reason some Better Business Bureaus have adopted the practice of sending a letter to the surviving relatives, and as a result the same mail which may bring one or more schemes also contains the following letter:

WARNING

Death notice vultures are making a systematic check of all obituary notices published in newspapers. These are often followed by calls from unscrupulous promoters who try to operate their schemes.

Glib salesmen may call on you within thirty days to interest you in a so-called historical biography of your deceased relative. There is a catch to it, so before any information is given or contracts signed, call the Bureau.

Salesmen offering questionable securities are always anxious to discover whether the deceased left any life insurance. By "blue sky" promises and fraudulent representations, they often defraud bereaved widows out of their insurance money. DO NOT DEAL WITH STRANGERS REGARDLESS OF HOW REASSURINGLY THEY TALK.

Relatives of the deceased often receive C. O. D. packages addressed in the name of the deceased. They assume that the merchandise has been previously ordered and payment is made. Such packages often contain Bibles with the name embossed on the cover, pen and pencil sets, etc. All cases investigated show that no such merchandise has been ordered. DO

"I am glad to endorse the program of *Detective Fiction Weekly* which will bring to its readers the truth about rackets and racketeers. No man can be swindled if he knows in advance what the swindler is going to do—and nobody *wants* to be swindled."—Edward L. Greene, General Manager of the National Better Business Bureau.

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NOT BE TRICKED BY THIS SCHEME. REFUSE TO ACCEPT THE PACKAGE OR PAY ANY MONEY UNTIL YOU GET ALL THE FACTS.

This warning is therefore sent to you for your information with the suggestion that you call the Better Business Bureau, if in doubt regarding any particular matter that comes to your attention. THERE IS NO CHARGE FOR OUR SERVICES.

ANYTHING THAT IS LEGITIMATE WILL STAND INVESTIGATION.

Better Business Bureau of Rochester, Inc.

IT is impossible in any series of articles exposing rackets to *anticipate* what new schemes will be devised to cheat you. It is always necessary for some one to be defrauded before the racket can be exposed. The trick is *not* to be that someone.

In addition to the rackets mentioned in the above letter, there are also the various individuals who want to provide the family with a memorial of the deceased—at a price. One of the cleverest and most plausible of these devices is that of "The Bureau of Permanent Records of Washington, D. C."

Their letter reads in part:

It is our pleasant duty to inform you that your late husband has been selected for the distinguished recognition of having his authentic biography registered for permanent record in the Library of Congress in Washington.

Their plan is simple. For $110 they will prepare three metal plaques 9 x 12 inches on which is etched a portrait and biographical sketch of the deceased. One of these is kept by the company, one for the Library of Congress, and one is sent to the purchaser. By copyrighting the plaque it is automatically filed in the Congressional Library *as is all copyrighted matter.* The usual cost of copyrighting varies from one dollar up.

Another individual who has his own particular racket, although I haven't heard from him recently, is a "one shot" dynamiter. He poses as an adjuster for some "Mutual" or "Compensation" company, and calls on the widow any time within a month after the funeral of her husband.

He seems surprised to learn that the deceased had not told his wife about an insurance policy he had taken out with the company which the young man claims to represent. Nevertheless, he says, an adjustment or a settlement must be made, but in view of the fact that the original policy is not available he proceeds to collect a fee, usually about ten dollars, for executing the necessary forms to prove the death of the insured and to definitely establish his identity as the policy holder.

He then goes away—forever. He changes his own name and the name of his company with every call, and he doesn't linger long in any particular city.

Men who are familiar with the ways of racketeers will tell you that there are any number of these "lone wolves" who evolve their own scheme and make it support them in their travels from town to town and city to city. The most casual investigation will prove that they are fakers.

It is well to remember that none of their propositions is so important that a twenty-four-hour delay—while you investigate—will affect your interests in the slightest—and it may save your money.

Next Week—Station F. A. K. E.

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Solving Cipher Secrets

A cipher is secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has used X to represent e, X will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. Thus, the affixes -ing, -ion, -ally are frequent. Read the helpful hints at the beginning of this department each week. The first cryptogram each week is the easiest.

M. E. OHAVER
"Sunyam"

AS his contribution to our *Twelfth Anniversary* celebration, Qpkwins offers No. X-31, an intriguing "double cipher," a cipher within a cipher, for your delectation! To find the first message, solve this cipher just as you would an ordinary cryptogram. But to find the second message (which contains just 22 letters), take certain letters and a certain word from the first message. Full explanation of No. X-31 will be published next week. Can you solve it?

No. X-31. What Is It? By Qpkwins.

HLVDXEKUTV LPKLYKND-PALPK; KYTL LPZRTPKL-YF; ZRPZDFL KNVLF; DP-BNYDNSVO BLYFNKDVL; LPVDXEKLPDPX! URYLAR-FK DP ZYOMKDZ KYNDPD-PX; DK RADKF PRKEDPX! GLLCVO!

Arrowhead's "One-Two" cipher, No. X-30 of two weeks ago, used the following tabular alphabet. Each hyphened pair of numbers represented a message character, the first number showing the row of the desired character in the key, and the second number its column. A short example of the encipherment and the translation in full are also subjoined. Identification of "2-13" as the word-spacer would convert this cipher into an ordinary cryptogram, which could then be solved in the usual way.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1	a	c	e	g	i-j	l	n	p	r	t	v	x	z
2	b	d	f	h	k	m	o	q	s	u	w	y	–

Message: C i p h e r — *etc.*
Cipher: 1-2 1-5 1-8 2-4 1-3 1-9 2-13 *etc.*

No. X-30. Cipher solving cultivates persistency, improves observation, and develops analytical ability.

Engineer opens this week's regular fare of cryptic puzzles with a division problem using a key-phrase, numbered *0123456 789*. Suggested solution: Separate the *odd* and *even* symbols and then analyze TCO × I = SSCC. In °See Bee Bee's cryptogram, see if you can guess the phrases ET OLR and ET G, duly noting the exclamatory signs. Follow up with VO RKT and EGRRAT; etc. Captain Kidd provides the phrase OXR OX and the ending -ADD for entry to FBAAD and OEFBADD in his crypt.

You might try for GR, GRNL, LR, and -GRJ in Zadig's message, as a starter. While in Y. B. Sad's construction, the endings -LEE, -EYE, and -LEL should help with groups 1 and 4. A solution of Abadaba's cipher No. 300 and the answers to all of this week's cryptograms will be given next week. Incidentally, a vulnerable spot in last week's Inner Circle cipher, Spondo's No. 294, was the 3-letter connective SHX (*and*), which led to XNAGNHXNX (*d- - - -nd-d*) as *descended;* etc. Asterisks in current Nos. 296 and 299 are prefixed to capitalized words.

No. 295—Cryptic Division. By Engineer.

```
TCO)UTTCYM(SIT
   UCYL
   ----
    STOY
    SSCC
    ----
     ACAM
     ASIL
     ----
      SUC
```


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No. 296—Song of Life. By °See Bee Bee.

"VO RKT HLSAN'D ESLGN PVTAN LP EGRRAT, VO RKT EVULZGY LP AVPT, ET OLR AVFT NZBE, NSVUTO YGRR-AT! ET G KTSL VO RKT DRSVPT!"—*ALOXPTAALH.

No. 297—Equine Opera. By Captain Kidd.

KADFABX VYHTA TXNBARTAXFD: XGVABYGD EYKD, VYGXFOTXD, BAHYUHABD, POBXD, FBAAD, BYORD, DFB-AOVD, BOXESAD, HOUUALD, OXR SYBDAD, ODDTDFAR PL DAHABOU OEFYBD OXR OX OEFBADD.

No. 298—Basement Mystery. By Zadig.

AZR AFTVUTO DLAZR GR KUT KLAU. ONFPPO YLVB GR-NL YHZMGRJ PFTRZXU. VUEZTNO KFTTGUVHB. XZTEU-RNUTO LR RUZTYB KLFOU LYOUTQU YHZXC OALCU, VU-ZNK XHUD, XFTHGRJ FE PTLA XKGARUB.

No. 299—Clever Chaps. By Y. B. Sad.

ENULDYUEYE XLALKH KDNULDY *NZUDLEL VKDOENX-UBYE, LMNKAKYLT ELALXKH VUHLE DRXYZ GXRV *EZKDSZKU, FZUNZ XLNRODY TUENRALXUDS XRKEYU-DS BXRNLEE TOXUDS HKYLX *VUDS TPDKEYP.

No. 300—Impending Bender. By Abadaba.

CHUMPS CAPHMY, CLUMPS CUADRX, CRUMPS CAFHM MHOLUX GLU. PANKHU GRATE LCMPS CUABRX, OLMRU XKPS ABRX, ULCMPS GREAT GATER.

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

289—Key:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
H	I	C	K	O	R	Y	N	U	T

290—The earth's weight is increasing nearly a pound every hour, due to the cosmic dust gathered up as it speeds through space!

291—Macintosh (to his rescuer): "Weel, laddie, ye've saved me from droonin', and ye'll no find me ungratefu'. Hev' ye got change for saxpence?"

292—Valiant valet vanquishes venturesome vagabond viewing vexatious victuals. Visiting vicar vetoes vituperation, volunteers venison. Vertigo vanishes.

293—"Zounds!" e j a c u l a t e d Sherlock. "Scotland Yard is surely slipping!" Simultaneously sleuth strode forth, seeking sly smuggler. Holmes triumphs, Pinkertons fail.

294—Aëronaut, who flew betwixt auk bevy and jagged ice floe, zoomed abruptly, lost momentum; ultimately descended, boomerang fashion, squarely onto Eskimo igloos.

Readers submitting answers to one or more of this week's puzzles Nos. 295-300, inclusive, will be duly credited in our Twelfth Anniversary *Cipher Solvers' Club!* Address: M. E. Ohaver, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

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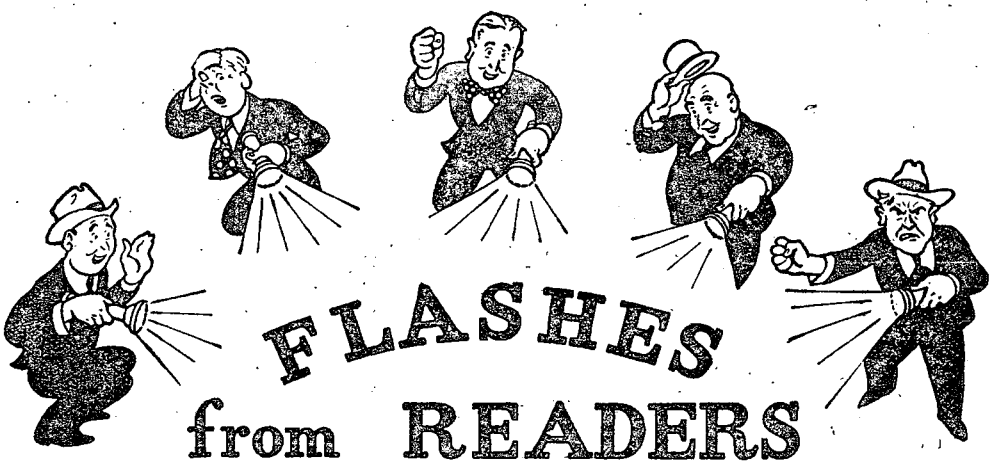

FLASHES from READERS

THE first story in this issue, "Stool Pigeon," by Frederick C. Painton, gives the readers of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY a true-to-fact, fictionized report about the exploits and adventures of a largely misrepresented class of men. Fighting the Underworld with its own weapons, subject to the same penalty which befalls captured spies in time of war, they work bravely, constantly, at a thankless task, usually unprotected by the very men they serve. The editors of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY are glad to be able to present this account of the other side of the picture, and will welcome letters from readers criticizing this story—favorably or adversely, of course.

This is a terrible state of affairs!

DEAR SIR:

Enclosed herewith, please find my remittance for a year's subscription to DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY. I am writing this from the Mercy Hospital. I think that you should run another series of articles on self-defense, like those ju-jutsu articles you had about a year ago.

It happened this way: It was a fine, sunshiny Wednesday morning, and I was on the way to work. You know how the brisk fall air puts the old vim and vigor into a guy?

And I already had the thin dime in my hand in order to buy my copy of DFW when I passed the corner news-stand. I work in a shipping department, and there are occasional dull moments when I can sneak in a moment's reading.

Well, I got to the news-stand, and there was only one copy of DFW left—this at eight-thirty in the morning, mind you. I had just slapped my ten-cent piece down on a pile of morning papers, and was pointing to the blue band of my favorite magazine when this other bloke heaves into sight.

He was big, and broad, and burly, and he opens with: "Hey, I'm a-goin' to buy that there magazine!"

Now, I might as well explain right here and now that I'm no lightweight myself, and those are fighting words, day or night. But I'm not cantankerous by nature, and I spend a good five minutes arguing and reasoning with this chap. All of which avails nothing, because he's dead set on having that magazine or my hide, and there's no two ways about it. So finally we get past hot and irate words, and begin slapping each other back and forth.

It was all going in my favor, too. I had rolled up a big woman's magazine and was giving him the dirty end of it when the dirty lowlife grabs a broken auto spring which the newsdealer uses for a weight, and began raising big welts on my skull with it.

That's when I got mad, and when I get mad, something snaps inside me, and I throw caution to the wind. I yanked that hunk of metal out of his big hairy paw, and I was really going to work on him in earnest when the cops showed up and laid me low with their nightsticks.

That's howcome I got arrested. That's why I'm in the hospital. And likewise, that explains the reason for my subscription. I can't afford to get into mixups like this very often.

I just thought you might like to know. Think

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over the business of the articles about self-defense. There might have been two of those guys fighting me, and then things would have been really tough.

Yours,
PADDY KELLY,
Scranton, Pa.

Sarah Watson is just getting into her stride.

DEAR SIR:

"Crooks Are Dumb," but *Sarah Watson* and her red-headed assistant are not. I think little *Grace* was rather dumb, but then, she had beautiful eyes, a beautiful shape, and beautiful ankles, according to the red head, and he ought to know.

It was a good story, fast moving and all of that. Let's have more stories about this pair, only I guess it will have to be a trio.

Glad to see *Daffy* again.

Yours truly,
A. KINDIG,
San Francisco, Calif.

Watch for the coming issues. Great stories are on the way!

DEAR SIR:

In reading your magazine, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, for almost eight years, I decided to write my first letter today. I have just finished the October 3 issue, reading "The Case of the Greedy Guardian." It was one of the best stories that has been published this year, to my estimation. So I hope that we have more stories as this one by Norbert Davis, with characters as *Slattery*, the boy and his small terrier dog.

Your true stories are very interesting, I often try to solve them as I read.

In conclusion, the articles of Frank Wrentmore are very interesting and educational to read. I hope Judson P. Philips, Whitman Chambers, "G-2," and Cornell Woolrich keep up their good work in their stories as they have in previous ones.

CHARLES WILLIAM,
Chicago, Ill.

How to make friends — and keep them!

DEAR EDITOR:

This business of reading DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY is something like taking a habit-forming drug. I haven't been reading the magazine as long as the chaps who can remember when it was FLYNN'S, but I haven't missed an issue for a couple of years, and I've been through every one of them.

This is the thing which has impressed me about DFW. Now with most magazines, when you recommend them to a friend, you're liable to have him skim through a couple of stories and tell you that as a picker you'd make a good stonemason.

But because of the variety of the contents in DFW, you can give it to the most discriminating of your friends and have him find plenty of fine stories in it to justify your opinions. There's always a dime's worth of pleasure in the magazine even if a chap only reads one novelette or a couple of the short stories, although, personally, I get a whale of a boot out of the whole magazine, from kiver to kiver.

Finding the magazine which suits you week in and week out is an important item in successful living, and now that I've discovered that DFW is that for me, I've been going around spreading the good news amongst my friends. And I guess nothing I've ever done has pleased so many people.

Yours truly,
KARL WORTH,
Tulsa, Okla.

All right, who is the most distant reader, counting New York as home?

DEAR EDITOR:

I was very interested in reading the letter from Jno. Cowperthwaite, of Pietermaritzburg, U. S. A., but I'm pretty sure that there are steady DFW readers who live even farther away.

For instance, there is my cousin, Edgar Artzmann, who is at present somewhere in Mongolia, working for an archaeological expedition on the fringe of the Gobi Desert. I don't know how hard he is working, or how much time he has for reading fiction, what with things the way they are in China and Mongolia these days, but the last thing he asked me before he left in July was that I should bundle up my old copies of DFW as I finish with them and to ship them on to him.

Mail from Ed is very sporadic, and after he gets this copy with the screed from the chap in the Union of South Africa, it is still going to take several months, at least, before he can present his claim. That's why I'm writing for Ed now.

It might be an interesting thing if the publisher were to determine somehow just where all the copies do eventually go—although it would be almost impossible, and only through conscientious coöperation from the readers who do the readdressing.

Sincerely,
ARTHUR GRIGGS,
Los Angeles, Calif.

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Coming Next Week

The Guy from Superstition

By Richard Sale

Dead eyes stared at *Daffy Dill*, mocking him, challenging him to unlock the secret of that murder. And *Daffy*, trying to learn how death struck so swiftly and suddenly, comes to grips with a criminal maniac.

Trail of the Torch

By Hugh B. Cave

Detective Bill Peck was on the spot. The boss wanted action—immediately if not sooner—on the Gage murder case. *Glory Gage*, the widow, was hiding something important, perhaps her own complicity. And *Peck* loved *Glory!*

Stories by:
T. T. FLYNN
FRED MacISAAC
and many others

Plus DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY facts, features and departments

Detective Fiction Weekly

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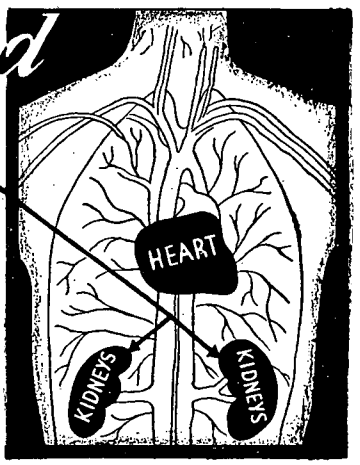
Acids in Blood-
must be removed
by Kidneys
Or your system is poisoned



Your Health Is Undermined and You May Suffer from Nervousness, Circles Under Eyes, Lack of Vitality, Getting Up Nights, Leg Pains, and Feel Tired, Run Down, and Worn Out

There is nothing that can so quickly undermine your health, strength, and energy, as an excess of acid in your blood. Most people when thinking of Acidity think of the stomach. However, the type of acidity that undermines health is that arising in the blood and often caused by worry, overwork, fear, late hours or over-indulgence, thus placing a heavy strain or load on the kidneys.

Nature has provided an automatic method of getting rid of these excess Acids in the blood. This is accomplished by your Kidneys, the most intricate and delicate organs in your body. Each kidney, although only the size of your clenched fist, contains 4½ million tiny, delicate tubes or filters. Your blood circulates through these tiny filters 200 times an hour, or so frequently that in a 24-hour period the kidneys actually filter and purify a barrel of blood, so that the Acids and poisonous wastes may be removed.

Causes Many Troubles

Dr. Walter R. George, many years Health Commissioner of Indianapolis, recently stated: "Modern foods and drinks, nervous strain, worry, and overwork, place a tremendous load on the kidneys. For this reason it is estimated that millions of men and women at times are troubled with poorly functioning kidneys. In fact this condition is often the real cause of thousands of people feeling older than they should, run-down, exhausted, nervous, and worn out."

If your kidneys slow down and do not function properly and fail to remove approximately 3 pints of Acids, Poisons, and liquids from your blood every twenty-four hours, then there is a gradual accumulation of these Acids and Wastes, and slowly but surely your system becomes poisoned. Kidney dysfunctions often may cause many troublesome conditions, such as Nervousness, Getting Up Nights, Leg Pains, Dizziness, frequent Colds and Headaches, Rheumatic Pains, Swollen Joints, Circles under Eyes, Backaches, Loss of Vitality, Burning, Itching, and Smarting, Acidity.

Help Kidneys Doctors' Way

Druggists and doctors in thirty-five countries throughout the world think that the right way to help your kidneys function is with the doctor's prescription Cystex, which is scientifically prepared in accordance with the requirements of the United States and British pharmacopoeia to act directly on the kidneys as a diuretic. For instance, Dr. C. Van Straubenzee, noted European physician, stated: "I consider Cystex one of the most meritorious formulas I have ever examined, and recommend it most highly." And Dr. C. J. Roberts, formerly of the Philadelphia General Hospital, states: "In my years of practice I have employed many medicines and prescriptions to improve the functional action of the kidneys, but in my opinion there is no preparation that excels the prescription known as Cystex." Positive proof of the merit of Cystex is in each package, which contains a complete list of ingredients, so that you can know what you are taking and be told by your doctor or druggist that Cystex is a medicine in which you can place the utmost confidence.

Make This 8-Day Guaranteed Test

If you are rundown, worn out, feel older than you are, or suffer from the conditions previously mentioned, poorly functioning kidneys may be the real cause of your trouble. At any rate it will do you no harm to put Cystex to the test and see exactly what it can do in your particular case. Under the guarantee, in 8 days' time it must do the work to your complete satisfaction, or you merely return the empty package, and the full purchase price is refunded without question or argument. With Cystex there is no long waiting for results, because it is scientifically prepared to act directly on the kidneys as a diuretic. For that reason most people report a remarkable improvement within the first forty-eight hours and complete satisfaction within 8 days. In testing Cystex, you are the sole judge of your satisfaction. You must feel younger, stronger, and better than you have in a long time—you must feel that Cystex has done the work thoroughly and completely, or you merely return the empty package and it costs you nothing. Cystex costs only 3c a dose at druggists, and as the guarantee protects you completely you can not afford to take chances with cheap, inferior, or irritating drugs or any medicine that is not good enough to be guaranteed. Telephone your druggist for guaranteed Cystex (pronounced Siss-tex) today.

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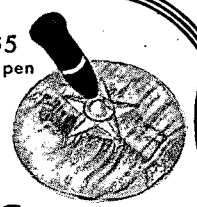
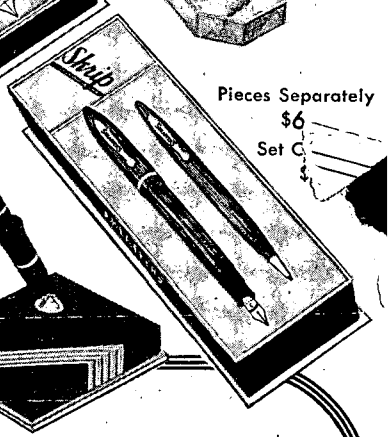


$5 with pen

Pieces Separately $8.50

Set Complete $7.50

$7.50 with pen



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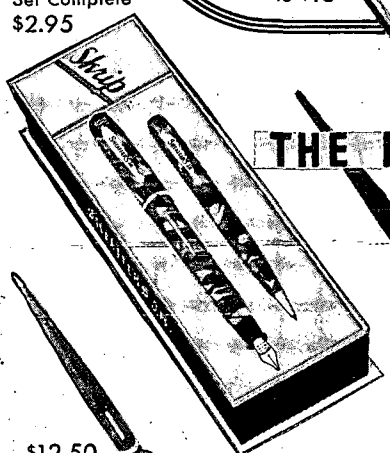

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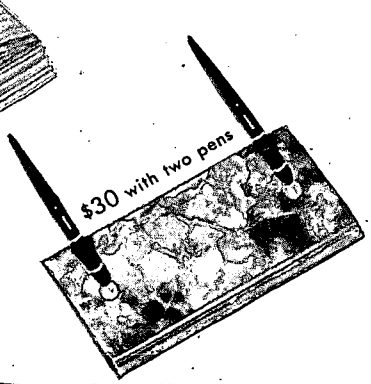

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